

A HOMECOMING



Alan Place

This is a work of fiction. Similarities to real people, places, or events are entirely coincidental.

A HOMECOMING

First edition. October 11, 2020.

Copyright © 2020 Alan Place.

ISBN: 978-1393177548

Written by Alan Place.

Also by Alan Place

Avenging Angels

[Avenging Angel](#)

Chronicles of Mark Johnson

[Chronicles of Mark Johnson](#)

[Inner Conflict](#)

Elfenmere

[Elfenmere](#)

Forgestriker

[Sons of Baal](#)

[Forgestriker](#)

[Return of the Lost](#)

[Terrors of D2](#)

[Flying Blind](#)

[Double Echo](#)

[Caldera Awakens](#)

Jehoiakim Altland

[The Reunion](#)

The DeBalliers

[The Curse of the DeBalliers](#)

The timely adventures of Charles Palmerston

[Did We See Him?](#)

Standalone

[From Elgar to Vaughan Williams](#)

[Glacier of Death](#)

[Holding Richmond](#)

[Nerja](#)

[Old Church Ghosts-Special Edition](#)

Sexual Explosions
Zombiewatch
Ghosts of Your Past
Sea Ghosts
The Ghost of St. Mary's
The Love of the Sea
The Rocking Lantern
The Lost Years
Debbie's beau
Janie's Return
A Sailor's Love
Old Church Ghosts - Special Edition
Flood Gates
Lifeboat Heroes
Death of a News Hound
Old Church Ghosts- The Unseen Version
Amelia
Akuji
The Cursed
The Overdale Incident
The Fortress
Riastrad
God Walks These Dark Hills
Why Me, Lord?
Mordhiemicus
Baal
Manhunt
A Homecoming

Watch for more at [Alan Place's site](#).

Table of Contents

Copyright Page

Also By Alan Place

Glossary

The Visions.

The Meeting in Milan.

Landing at Ben Gurion.

Reunited.

On the beach.

The Masada Pilgrimage

The Long Night.

More questions than answers.

Back on the track

Back to work

The call to Adriana.

Chapter 12

Adriana calls time on the relationship.

Further Reading: A Sailor's Love

About the Author

Glossary

This story includes Yiddish terms, so I have added a glossary of the words I use in the story:

Aliyah - A homecoming for the people of Israel, a call to return to your homeland from wherever you may be.

Shalom - The traditional greeting akin to Hello.

Motek - Sweetheart.

Zevel - A Hebrew term meaning rubbish.

L' Chaim - "To life," similar to the toast "Cheers."

B'ezrat HaShem - With God's help or good luck.

Shalom Aleichem - "Peace be upon you."

Aleichem Shalom - The traditional response to Shalom Aleichem; it means "Unto you peace."

Shavua Tov - A greeting that means "Have a good week."

Oy vey! - A term that relates to saying, "Oh Lord!"

Mizman Loh hitraehnu - A phrase that means "Long time no see."

Atah tzabar o oleh, - "Are you a native of Israel or an immigrant?"

Ani meh Dimona - "I'm from Dimona."

Lehitraot - "Goodbye for now."

Cast:-

Kim Altland, a Jewish writer who returned to Israel.

Adrianna Kucinski - Kim's friend and lover

Mark Wilkerson - Kim's school friend.

Hannah Holm - Kim's Danish reporter friend.

Abir Moszkowicz- the former editor of the Jewish Express newspaper, and Kim's friend and mentor.

Chapter 1

The Visions.

Jehoiakim Altland, the Jewish photojournalist – known to his friends as Kim – awoke with a start. His heart was pounding, and his body was dripping with a cold sweat that made his pajama top stick to him. He raised his tired body against the pillow at his back, and wiping the sleep from his eyes, he got out of bed and walked the few yards to the bathroom in the small apartment he'd called home in the years he'd lived in the UK. The apartment was a running joke between Jehoiakim and his editor at the Jewish Express newspaper, Abir Moszkowicz. Jehoiakim's point was that he spent so little time in the studio, why should I bother having more than the basics, to which Abir would contend that if he did take a break, he needed to have some comforts to look forward

Jehoiakim glanced at the clock by his bed through blurry, sleep-deprived eyes, and seeing it was too late to go back to sleep and too early to go to work, he got up to run a glass of water to take the pills the doctor had prescribed for his heart. After running the tap to get the water cold, he poured himself a glass of water and stumbled back to his bed. Sitting there, staring out at the city still waking up, he thought, "How many more nights' sleep am I going to lose with images of this lady? How many more sleepless nights can I endure before I end up going mad through lack of sleep?"

He sat on the bed fiddling with the blankets and trying to think where he had previously seen the mysterious lady in his dreams, but the harder he tried, the more his mind fogged, and the elusive woman seemed to vanish. Jehoiakim had suffered endless sleepless nights, and finally this morning, his mind snapped. He leaped to his feet, and in a fit of rage, he threw his glass against the wall.

"Stay calm! The last thing you need is for Abir to find you dead," he thought as he felt his heart begin to race, and his vision blur.

After a short rest, he got dressed and went to get his car from the basement where he'd parked it the night before. Jehoiakim was in such a state, he almost passed his vehicle before realizing where he was. He loathed taking a break. That had been the driving force behind his success on the paper: he never knew when to call it a day with a story. The story of the mysterious woman had become a personal mission; something was niggling at the back of his mind. He couldn't think what it was, and that is what worried him.

The drive to the offices was short, but Jehoiakim stopped off in a cafe to have a coffee in an attempt to calm his shaking. While he was there, he phoned ahead to Abir, "Hello, Abir, could you spare me for two weeks? I think I need a vacation. I want to go on an Aliyah, a homecoming back to Israel. I have something that I need to clear up for my peace of mind. I'll tell you more when I get to the office."

Abir, who rarely left the office, didn't take long to reply, "Of course, you can take the time; this is the third time you've asked for a vacation in the eight years that you've worked here. This trip must be important to you to request the time off. I am intrigued to find out the reason for your request."

After the 20-minute drive from his lodgings to the newspaper offices, Jehoiakim pulled into the office car park and stopped his engine. The longer he thought about his situation, the more he was puzzled about what was going on. Being Jewish, he'd learned the value of staying calm, thinking things through, and not making rushed decisions, but the more he tried to figure out his problem, the more he found himself at a loss.

Abir watched as his disheveled friend entered the room in a rush, and said to his secretary, "Joanna, this looks like being a long morning; can you make some coffee please?" Abir then walked over to his desk. "Shalom. Before we get to the reason for your request for the aliyah, when do you want the time off?"

Jehoiakim replied, "Shalom, Abir. I must apologize for my appearance and the rushed entrance; I have many things on my mind. When is it suitable for the paper that I take my vacation?"

Abir shrugged his broad shoulders, and then replied, with typical Jewish humor in his tone, "You ask, when can I let you go? My friend, you so rarely ask for time off." Abir laughed and then continued, "I am usually the one begging you to take a vacation or lose the time. You are the paper's best writer, but unless you take a break once in a while, I fear you'll repeat the nervous breakdown you had the year you arrived. You were so keen to impress, you drove yourself to exhaustion, All I can say is tell me when you want your aliyah, and I'll book the dates on the calendar for you. I can tell by your appearance that something serious is going on. In all the years of our friendship, you've never seemed so on edge and looking so ragged."

Jehoiakim replied, "You're right. There are too many things on

my mind, and I'm worried I'll have a breakdown if I can't sort at least the main issues out soon. I want to fly to Israel next week if you can spare me. Abir. I recall those early days well, my friend. I recall thinking my writing at the time as a hack writer was zewel."

Abir smiled and said, "You may have been rough around the edges, but your work was far from rubbish. I have always admired your tenacity and devotion to the truth." Raising his hands to the heavens, Abir added, "Even if it does make you enemies in high places. Don't worry about the dates, consider the dates booked. Now, can you please enlighten me about what made you ask for time off."

Joanna came in and put the coffee pot on the table in front of Jehoiakim. After thanking her, Jehoiakim continued their discussion, "For the last two weeks, I've had vivid dreams about taking an aliyah. I can't tell you why this year of all years. Something is driving me to return this year. In these dreams, I see a beautiful mature woman with a full figure and dark brown hair beckoning me to the shores of Eilat - at least I think it's Eilat."

Abir sipped his coffee and was deep in thought. After a while, he replied, "You and mature women! Will nothing change? Correct me if I'm wrong, but you haven't been to Israel in the last five years - other than for the job in Tel Aviv - have you?"

Jehoiakim didn't need to think about his answer, "No, you are right. I haven't been to my homeland since then. That job was important to us, and I spent the week in Tel Aviv ."

Abir continued with his line of inquiry by asking, "In that case, what makes you think your dream was about Eilat and not Tel Aviv or Jerusalem?"

"Abir, the only thing that comes to mind is I can hear jazz music playing in the background."

Abir smiled as he realized his friend could be right. Eilat holds an annual music festival, but something else was intriguing him, "Have you any idea who the woman is? Have you thought of anyone recently who could have triggered your thoughts?"

After a little thought, Jehoiakim replied, "No, I have no idea who she is. Most of my dreams have been about the trip to Eilat. It's only in the last week that she has appeared in my mind."

There followed a short silence. Then the phone rang. After the call, Abir said, "Joanna has booked your flight and hotel; all you need to do is pack and relax."

Jehoiakim glanced around at the map on the wall showing the areas covered by the paper, and then said, "Relaxing is the last thing I can do, Abir. Solving these mysteries could make a big story for our paper. I don't want to mess things up."

Abir arose from his chair and walked past Jehoiakim on his way to the cabinet to get a file; he said, "Listen to yourself. For once, take a break and relax. Who knows, this woman might turn out to be the holiday romance you need to calm down."

Jehoiakim paced around the office, first looking out at the throbbing world outside the window and then at the world map on the office wall. He walked to where Abir was standing and asked his friend, "Do you think I still push myself too hard, Abir?"

Abir turned from the cabinet and replied, "If you are asking the question, you know in your heart what the answer is. You do need to retake the trip to Israel. I think if you don't go, you'll end up having a breakdown. But, one thing still puzzles me."

Jehoiakim scratched the stubble on his chin and replied, "What's puzzling you?"

Abir gave a slight shrug, "You still haven't told me why you want to go this year?"

Jehoiakim thought about how to answer that unanswerable question and then said, "I can give no precise reason. The only thing I know is that for some reason, my homeland is calling to me louder than ever before, and I need to answer the call. Perhaps I'll find the answer when I get there; maybe there is no definite answer to your question."

Abir raised his cup, downed the last of his coffee, and then said to Jehoiakim, "L'chaim. Finish your coffee. You have a lot to do, and not long to do it. I hope your journey is fruitful and brings you the peace of mind that you need so badly. Shavua Tov"

Jehoiakim raised his cup and repeated the toast, "B'ezrat HaShem. L'chaim, to life and what it may bring."

The week passed too quickly. Although Jehoiakim was sure that he had things in order, there remained a niggling thought he'd forgotten something. The days seemed to drag, but the week flew by. He had many things on his mind, not the least the mystery woman: who was she, and what did she have to do with the aliyah? Try as he might, Jehoiakim could not recall seeing her face before,

but something seemed familiar about her.

Chapter 2

The Meeting in Milan.

Jehoiakim's writing was becoming jaded; he lacked the biting touch his readers had come to expect. Even if the regular work paid the bills, there was no satisfaction in writing lackluster articles for younger readers when he wanted to deliver unique items. Sure, he had gained a massive following with the youngsters, but did he want to report on the pop circus? Life was moving fast, and he was missing the real stories.

Although he was a Jew, Jehoiakim had spent the majority of his life far away from Israel, mostly in England, but his work as a photojournalist could take him anywhere at a moment's notice. Deep in his heart, he knew something was missing in his life. He knew he needed to return to the Holy Land for some reason, but the reason evaded him. He had been so busy he'd never had the time to plan a trip. He found the longer he waited, the more the wish to return burned in his soul.

Joanna, Abir's secretary, had booked the flight from London to Tel Aviv. At this late hour, Jehoiakim needed to rush his plans for the trip, but he finally had them in place and was looking forward to the five-hour flight. Then something happened that changed them. He was walking across the airport foyer trying to find which queue to join when he got a call to go to the arrivals desk, where there was a quick, garbled message left for him from Abir: "I've arranged for you to meet Adrianna Kucinski in Milan. She's doing a European tour, and her flight to Bucharest doesn't link with her flight from Milan for a few hours; she'll meet you in Milan."

As a journalist, Jehoiakim had kept abreast of the writing world - even if he had stopped writing outside his job on the Jewish Express - so he had an idea who Adrianna was. As a reporter, he'd made a name for himself by asking interviewees awkward questions and not giving up until he got close to the truth - as he saw it. His style had won him fans and respect from his readers, but he'd also made enemies of some influential people. Death threats were nothing new to him, either as a Jew or as a hard-talking reporter. He always kept in mind the quote from Woodrow Wilson, "If you want to make enemies, try to change something."

Change is a constant companion as people's views, opinions, and political interplay are always moving, changing faster than the

winds sometimes. Your friend today can become an enemy overnight; such is the life the Jewish people have been forced to live since time began. The Jews had long ago learned that trust is as fickle as the desert winds; most people will turn on you if it is to their benefit. Those who stand by you at any cost risk becoming targets of hate themselves; those are the people you can trust even if there are few of them to be found.

Jehoiakim had accepted the meeting with Mrs. Kucinski without a second thought; he had little else to do. It had been too late to question the call when he received it, and he could use a stopover once in a while. The plane landed in Milan, and Jehoiakim made his way to the lounge for a cup of coffee - "When in Milan, try the best coffee in Italy," one of his colleagues had told him on his return from a job in Italy. Jehoiakim sat in the lounge, listening to the flights called in. As there was nothing to suggest that Adrianna's flight from Barcelona was nearing, he decided to have a coffee and a pastry.

The unexpected change to his plans meant that he had to visit the currency exchange booth to get some lira for his snack as all he had in his pocket was sterling. The travelers' checks were safely locked in his luggage. He had time to open the case, but he didn't want to open it - after all, he only needed a light snack, not a full meal.

Jehoiakim glanced around the lobby, trying to get his bearings and find his way to the pastry counter. After getting his coffee and cake, he went in search of a seat, preferably one with a view of the arrivals screens. The screens showed the flight from Barcelona was about an hour out of Milan with no unexpected delays. As always, he began to sweat, a trait of his since childhood. When meeting somebody new, even in his late 40's, he hadn't shaken this habit; "Some things don't change," he muttered as he waited and watched the passengers disembark from the flights. "Stations, airports, and bus terminals lives crisscrossing in a mesh, and nobody cares who you are, or where you're going."

Jehoiakim began to feel on edge. As the time for Adrianna's flight came closer, he started to wonder whether she would object to having her short stopover disrupted by another writer, when she expected a rest in her schedule? He asked why she had agreed to this meeting in the first place. Abir had said that she had a busy schedule planned and had not much time to spare before going on

to the second part of the book signing tour and then returning to Israel for her winter break.

Jehoiakim began to pace. "Why am I so nervous? This meeting isn't the first I've done, and I hope it won't be my last." He'd got so wound up, and he realized with a start that he'd wandered out of sight of the arrivals board. As he gathered his thoughts and walked back to the seat he'd left, he glanced at the board above him. The flight was on the circuit, and the passengers would be disembarking within 20 minutes.

While he waited for Adrianna to appear, it came to him that in all the rush to change flights, he'd had no time to collect ideas for questions. "This is going to be interesting; I don't know what to talk about or if she has any taboo subjects to avoid. Talk about winging it!" Jehoiakim smiled as he thought of the possibilities he was about to meet. He'd never gone into an interview blind before. He had made a habit of blindsiding his interviewee with questions they either didn't know how to answer or chose to avoid, but he'd always been in control until now.

The flight landed on time, and Jehoiakim watched as the passengers walked down the aisles to their different meetings. Some met friends or relatives; others met with business associates. It was easy to see the relationships involved by the degree of personal contact in the meeting. To an observer of people, such as Jehoiakim, it was clear that many people were passing through Milan.

He was so intent on watching the traffic, it was a few minutes before he realized that the Barcelona passengers had fully disembarked, and Adrianna was not among them. "I hope nothing happened to her," he thought as he made his way to the information desk. His mind was running ahead of him at this point, and he began to wonder about all the various scenarios that could have to take place between the time the meeting was arranged and now.

He arrived at the desk and waited impatiently for his turn. When it came, he didn't know where to start asking questions. "Can you tell me if Ms. Adrianna Kucinski was on the Barcelona flight, please? We planned to meet, but she hasn't come through customs, and the other passengers have left the terminal."

The young woman at the desk checked the passenger list and replied, "I'm sorry; according to our information, your friend wasn't on the flight from Barcelona."

Jehoiakim thanked the young woman and went to get another coffee; now more than before, he needed a drink to calm his nerves. In these days of terrorism, there are so many scenarios, he needed time to get his thoughts clear, but it is hard when you think somebody you know could be in danger.

"Airports," he muttered as he looked at the crowds milling around. "People coming, going, and meeting people. All these people's lives cross, and they go unnoticed. I wonder how many people passing through could describe even one person here?"

Jehoiakim walked over to the window and wondered, "Are you in the circuit, Adrianna?" With little else to do, he ordered his coffee and went back to his table. He realized that worrying about things only made them seem worse than they might be in reality, but when someone is late, it is unavoidable - especially if you have no reason for the delay. He sat and pondered, "I wonder where these planes are from and where they are going. There are so many airlines and destinations to choose from these days. I wonder what makes a person choose their destination?" He was so deep in thought that he didn't hear a faint voice call his name. "Excuse me, are you Jehoiakim? I apologize for the introduction; my editor asked me to meet you, but gave me no information about your description."

With a start, he turned to see the face of a beautiful, mature Jewish woman looking at him, "Yes, I am; you must be Adrianna. Please, have a seat."

Adrianna replied, "I am sorry to have caused a delay, and I apologize if I worried you. I have a good reason. I stopped over in Turin for a couple of hours."

A little perplexed, Jehoiakim inquired, "Turin?"

Adrianna smiled and replied, "Yes, your articles on the Superga tragedy there aroused my interest, and as I don't know if I will be in this area again, I decided to see the scene of the crash. It was a great tragedy that all those lives got lost returning from the match in Portugal. To think that most of the Italian national team died in that crash is terrible."

Jehoiakim glanced at her beautiful face and said, "What is worse, is that outside Italy few people have heard of the collision, yet many can recall the Munich disaster. In honor of those who died in the accident when the plane crashed into the Basilica of Superga, the structure remains as it did the night of the crash. The other

teams played their reserve squads for the remaining matches of that season so Turin would win the title."

Adrianna smiled, ran her fingers through her hair, and then she asked, "What made you come to Milan? Most people who visit Italy want to see Rome or Venice."

Jehoiakim shrugged, and then replied, "I guess I am not like most people. It isn't anything religious. I never fancied seeing Rome. As for Venice, my friends tell me it is like an open sewer. Other than that, I have long had a fascination with Milan and Northern Italy, driven by the desire to find information on the top police officer of the 1950s, Mario Nardone. Inspector Nardone was responsible for breaking up the major crime rings in Milan at the time, and yet, I have tried everywhere, but I can't find any information on his life. Do you think it is indicative of the modern society that we know more about the criminals than the police who bring them to justice?"

Adrianna gave a short laugh and then said, "I think it is more a case of the crime being more interesting because of what got stolen. People's thirst for the knowledge of what others have is unquenchable; that is why gossip columns are so widely read."

Jehoiakim shrugged, and then replied, "That is true, and it is the main reason I chose not to write celebrity articles for my paper. I prefer to write about what is happening, not about which celebrity is doing their thing this week. Numerous other writers fill that space. I can't tell you how honored I am that you stopped over for my interview. I realize how busy you must be and that you are on a whistle-stop tour of Europe to promote your book."

Adrianna ran her fingers across the table and replied, "Believe me, I am pleased to have this opportunity to take a breath. At my age, dashing around Europe is no fun. I, too, am honored that you took the time to interview me. From what my editor emailed me, you're on your aliyah and are returning to Israel this year. Is there a reason why you chose this year?"

Jehoiakim looked at Adrianna and then said, "All I know, is that for months, I have had dreams of a mature woman beckoning me to the shores at Eilat. For some reason, I am feeling the pull of my homeland more this year than ever. I get the sense that something important is about to happen in my life, but for the Lord's sake, I have no idea what it is."

Adrianna sat in quiet contemplation for a moment, and then she

said, "Are you sure you hadn't had the woman on your mind? Sometimes these memories lie hidden for years. Perhaps your paths crossed on your last trip home."

Jehoiakim glanced around the lounge, and then replied, "I could say that was the case, but my last trip was only a quick, one-week business trip to Tel Aviv to make some contacts in the area, and I was so busy working, I had no opportunity to leave the city. I can say with certainty that I have never seen this woman before or been to Eilat, but both she and the area seem familiar to me for some reason."

Adrianna sat quietly for a minute or two and then replied, "There is another possible explanation. Perhaps you overheard somebody talking about Eilat and wondered what it would be like to visit the city. I realize this still doesn't explain your mystery, woman. Are you sure it isn't me you're thinking of?"

He replied, "No. Now we've met, there is one thing I am convinced of, and that is the woman I keep seeing is not as tall as you, and she has a fuller figure. Her hair is a darker brown than yours. I don't recall seeing her before, but her face seems familiar to me."

Adrianna thought for a moment and then commented, "I know it's a remote chance, but have you seen her on TV or in the cinema and not realized the connection?"

Jehoiakim smiled, then replied, "Your hypothesis could be correct, apart from the fact that I am too busy working to watch TV, and I couldn't tell you the last film I saw at the cinema. One of the reasons for the trip this month is my editor told me that I have been pushing myself too hard for too long. He's worried I am heading for a nervous breakdown similar to one I had several years ago."

Thinking she'd hit a subject that he didn't wish to talk about, Adrianna paused and then remarked, "Your editor is a wise man it would seem. I feel a little embarrassed that your homecoming has involved you in this interview when you need a rest."

Jehoiakim was now the one feeling embarrassed, and he replied, "Please don't feel that way. I know I'm in a rush because the meeting came as a surprise. I won't deny I need a rest, but I wouldn't have missed the meeting for anything, Adrianna."

The milling crowd of people caught Adrianna's gaze for a moment, an action that didn't go unnoticed by Jehoiakim. He decided if she wanted to raise the matter; it was her choice and not

his business to pry. However, the thought that two people meeting on a whim and both imagining they saw someone they knew, in the same airport lounge, to him appeared a very remote possibility, but here they were.

As he glanced at her, he saw her face seem to lose its color. To ease her tension, he asked, "Do you want to hear a funny story about the first trip I took to Canada?"

Realizing that he'd seen her reaction and done the gentlemanly thing by not approaching the topic, she said, "I didn't know you'd been to Canada; please go on."

Jehoiakim continued, "It was my first flight to Canada. I was going to see a friend - who has since passed away - I was going through customs when I got stopped. My friend was an excellent cook, and she had asked me if I could bring some bay leaves over, as we had a tree in our garden in the UK. I had never thought there would be any complications, but the guards stopped me at the checkpoint. I had my bags searched as if I was a smuggler, and all the time, I was wondering what was going on. I still needed to get through customs and not having the Canadian cell link; I had no way of telling her what was going on. She was on one side of the barrier, and I was on the other; we were only a few hundred meters apart, but it might as well have been thousands of miles. When it was over, and we met, we had a good laugh about the matter over a cup or two of coffee."

Adrianna gave a weak smile and then commented, "I'm sorry I got distracted; I thought I saw somebody I hadn't seen for years, but it couldn't have been the lady I thought it was. Thank you for being a gentleman and trying to take my mind off things without causing me some embarrassment by asking questions I did not wish to answer - for now."

Jehoiakim was unsure what to say, but he thought he glimpsed a way to ease the growing tension. "Why shouldn't the person be here? I realize it is a bit of a long shot, but these things do happen. Milan is the tourist center of the north of Italy, after all."

Adrianna glanced at Jehoiakim and urged him to lean in as she said in a whisper, "I realize that, but I thought the person I saw was killed in a car crash several years ago. I went to her funeral. When I Looking back, something did seem odd about the burial."

Jehoiakim leaned forward to hear the rest of the story, and then he asked, "What appeared to be odd?"

Adrianna cast her mind back to that day, and after a pause, she replied, "The casket seemed too light to carry the person I recalled, and I noticed a woman in black hovering on the edge of the service. She never came fully into view, but she was always there, on the edge of my vision like now."

Jehoiakim replied, "I have to say that does sound weird to me. I've heard about the feeling of someone walking over your grave. Some scientists put this down to somebody crossing your path in an alternate reality. To believe this, you need to believe in the multiverse theory that for each action we take, another world got created for the action we never took. Another theory is that if you meet three people from your past, it's a sign of an omen of your impending death. For myself, I am not sure which theory I believe."

Adrianna looked around, trying to see the woman again, but she was not in sight. She turned back to Jehoiakim and said, "Where does that leave me? Quantum theory? Superstition? Or am I going mad?"

Jehoiakim was in the unfamiliar position of being cornered. He tried to recover lost ground by saying, "You have to remember that I am here because I keep having dreams of a woman I think I've seen before, but I can't recall where or when I saw her."

Adrianna gave a quick look at the clock by the departure board, and said, "I'm sorry to rush, but I need to catch the next flight to Bucharest. If we exchange cell phone numbers, I can contact you when I get back to Israel in a week, if you're still here, and you can tell me the other story about your trip to Canada. Shalom aleichem."

Jehoiakim and Adrianna swapped phone numbers, and she said, "Aleichem shalom." As she was about to leave for her flight, he called out, "Adrianna, do you see my mystery lady at the pastry counter?"

Adrianna quickly glanced at the counter, and then shrugged her shoulders and headed to the queue for the flight to Bucharest.

Jehoiakim took another glance in the direction of the counter, and he thought, "Am I going mad? Why come home this year of all years, and what is the meaning of seeing this woman in my dreams?" He watched as the line of people for Bucharest slowly entered the plane, and with a sigh, he muttered, "Shavua Tov, Adrianna. We shall meet again; the next time, it will be in Israel. I may not be in Tel Aviv when you get home, but I won't be far away."

Abir, you old devil, you had this planned all along - you're trying to engineer the romance between Adrianna and me. Well, she is breathtaking and intelligent. Perhaps she is the love you were talking about my having."

As he turned from watching the last people board the flight, Jehoiakim began to question the rationale of his trip. He had traveled home on the whim of seeing an unknown woman beckon him to a city he had never visited. "Am I going mad?" he thought as he wandered back to his table to finish his coffee. He laughed and then thought, "That was interesting, not at all what I was expecting. Perhaps our meeting in Israel will prove more fruitful." Then with a smile, he muttered, "As I have time on my hands when in Rome, or this case, Milan, take in the sights." He rose from his seat and picked up his luggage.

As the stopover was unplanned, Jehoiakim asked at the information desk for directions to a cheap hostel for the night as he was used to "roughing it." Being a journalist meant sleeping in many different conditions, not that he thought he'd get any sleep that night. Why would he? He felt the closer he got to Israel, the stronger the visions were of his mystery lady. After waiting in line, he was given direction to a nearby hostel. He was about to leave the desk when the young woman called to him, "Mr. Altland, don't forget your ticket for the Tel Aviv flight."

He turned back to pick up his ticket and then made his way to the shuttle - a 40-minute drive from the city to the Affittacamere Hostel. After walking up the stairs to his room and putting his bags down, Jehoiakim looked out at his surroundings. "Plain, but the room suits my needs." The hostel room was frugal, but Jehoiakim was only after a bed and breakfast stop and not planning to stay more than one night. The Affittacamere Hostel was close to both the San Siro Stadium - home of AC Milan - and the famous Monza racetrack, both venues high on his to-see list but below the fabulous Duomo di Milano cathedral in all its splendor.

He put the kettle on for a coffee. "Oy vey, so much to see, so little time to see it. There are many things outside the city that I have no time to explore, not the least of which is Bergamo with its Italian-Jewish roots. I'll need to take a vacation here one day. How often have I told myself that, and how many times have I talked myself out of taking the vacation I need?"

Jehoiakim knew he'd earned his vacation, but he still felt wrong

taking time off. His friends had told him that he was getting too on edge about things he couldn't control, and if he didn't take a break, they might be forced to end their friendship with him for the sake of all concerned.

Over the years, he'd viewed many places to visit for a vacation. Italy was always his first choice, followed by Israel, the USA, and Spain. Not far behind was Greece, Norway, and Austria, but the prize was Italy, and here he was in Milan but with no time for enjoyment. He began unpacking his overnight bag to find some traveler's checks to pay for his dinner and to gather his photo gear to take with him as he took in the sights his short time allowed. "This journey will make the background to a good story," he thought as he walked down the stairs to the lobby and out into the bustling city. "I can see it: journalist seeks the truth about mystery woman's lost history - where did she come from, and what was she doing wandering around Milan?"

The elegance of this Italian city didn't escape him, but Jehoiakim had the feeling that what he sought lay not here, but in Israel, his homeland. He kept seeing flashes of the sea and explosions of light, followed by loud sirens and noise. Then nothing but a faint voice calling his name, forever getting softer, as if the caller was drifting away. No matter how he tried, the vision kept coming back more vividly until he was forced to blink and shake his head to remove it.

Outside on the Via Ignazio Ciaia, he noticed the narrow streets packed with cars, typical of many such areas in Italy, he supposed. Another thing he saw was a bistro. He didn't have much money to spare, so he bought a sandwich rather than a more substantial dinner.

Later, Jehoiakim took a stroll in the fading light to the Cathedral to take some romantic moonlit photos of the magnificent building. Churches – no matter what religion – always amazed him. In those days without today's modern equipment, he was in awe of how churches and cathedrals were so dominating, and he still recalled the early stories of John Wesley preaching to a crowd that he didn't need a large church to be able to praise the Lord's work. "How different to today's Evangelists with their large businesses," he thought as he stopped to shoot some photos.

The cool of the night began to chill his bones, despite the thick sweater he was wearing, so Jehoiakim decided to turn in for the

evening as he had an early flight to Tel Aviv ahead of him. As he lay on the bed, several thoughts passed through his mind, "Who is she? Why do I get the feeling I know her, and yet I can't place her face? Why did I need to return this year?" The thoughts mingled with the soft breeze as he dozed off; the next thing he recalled was his alarm call and getting up.

Chapter 3

Landing at Ben Gurion.

He stood in line for the flight to Tel Aviv, thinking, "Oh, vey! It's a four-hour flight, and the flight from London would only have been a little longer." He boarded the plane, found his seat by the window, and prepared himself for the flight to Israel, still not sure why he was going and what the mystery woman had to do with anything.

Although he had flown several times, his heart again pounded on take-offs and landings, even if he was confident the pilot had things under control. He had joked with friends that flying was safer than driving, but he still felt queasy then. The flights themselves never bothered him; "It's the thought of being locked in a tin can at 14,000 feet," he told himself.

However, he finally settled down and began to read the book he had brought for the flight, *The Chronicles of Mark Johnson*. Jehoiakim felt a kindred spirit flowed with the character in the story. Mark Johnson was also a reporter with a tough exterior hiding his vulnerability.

The blue waters of the Mediterranean Sea passed by, and before he knew it, the plane was heading into Israeli airspace. He hadn't been back for several years, but he was in no rush to exit the aircraft.

After the majority of the passengers had departed the plane, Jehoiakim joined them on the route to the border check, wondering if he would be stopped as he had been at the Canadian border both times he visited Edmonton. There was a minimal delay as the security guards ran routine checks for bombs or illegal software on his laptop. As he stood, trying to gather his thoughts, he muttered, "Mizman Loh hitraehnu."

Behind him, a lady asked, "Have you been away long?"

He turned to see a younger woman and replied, "I've been away for five years, but five years too long."

The woman inquired, "Atah tzabar o oleh?"

He smiled at the thought that after all his time away, his looks still led people to assume he was Jewish. He replied, "Ani meh Dimona. I was born in Israel, but I spent most of my time living in Europe and writing for the European presses. One thing hasn't changed, and that is the humidity; it's still as oppressive as I recall from my previous trip!"

The woman smiled at Jehoiakim and asked, "Would you consider me rude, or too forward if I invited you to sit with me for a while? I'm waiting for someone, and I'm alone at the moment."

Jehoiakim smiled back and then commented, "I would consider the request an honor. I am at a loss; I thought I was going to Tel Aviv, but I have a feeling Eilat will be my final destination."

The woman looked quizzically at him, and then she asked, "Why do you think that?"

He went on to explain about the woman in his dreams and the overwhelming sense that he needed to return to Israel this year for some reason. He ended by saying, "You probably think I'm foolish, coming here because of things I heard and saw in a dream. I think I am."

She smiled and said, "Not at all. My first vacation was because of a dream." She glanced across the lounge and said, "It's been pleasant talking to you, but my ride is here. I must be on my way. Lehitraot, I wish you a safe journey, and may you find what you seek in Eilat."

She got up and walked toward a man who was waving to her. After a brief greeting, the two kissed, and Jehoiakim thought, "I hope you find what you seek, too."

At loose ends, he started to wander. He was not sure what to do as Abir had told him he'd booked a room, but not in which hotel. He had been roaming for several minutes when he spotted a man with a sign saying, "Jehoiakim Altland." Unsure what to do, he approached the man, and inquired, "Are you waiting for me?"

The man smiled, and said, "Yes, Mr. Altland, I'm your escort to the plane. The flight to Eilat will leave shortly, and we wanted to be sure that you're on it."

Jehoiakim stopped and asked, "Who is the 'we' of which you talk?"

The man explained, "I am part of a group that has been watching you for several years. We need your openness in writing and your contacts in journalism to attempt to combat the bias against the state of Israel in the western media. Now, can we get on the plane, please?"

After a moment's pause, Jehoiakim consented and went with his guide to the other side of the airport to catch the aircraft for the flight to Eilat. The charter flight rolled down the runway, and with a rush took off into the blue Israeli sky, "What a change to the grey skies I left behind in England," Jehoiakim thought.

On landing, the passengers passed through the lounge before being met by a car. Jehoiakim and the stranger got taken to a beach hotel. Looking out at the Red Sea, he couldn't stop wondering, "What is this about, why have I come to Eilat this year?"

Jehoiakim turned from his view of the sea and was startled to see the mysterious woman from his dreams sitting on the bed. With a sexy smile on her lips, she said, "I'm glad you could come, Jehoiakim."

Startled, he asked, "Who are you? I get the feeling I know you, but I can't place when or where we met."

The lady draped herself on the coverlet, and replied seductively, "My name is unimportant. You do know me, but not from seeing me. I am to you, what you see as your image of a Jewish lady. I exist only in your mind."

Finally, a look of recognition came over Jehoiakim as he realized where he'd seen the woman before. "I know where I've seen you before. You're the memory of my favorite aunt, and a woman I knew once, both rolled into one person."

The lady continued, "Shortly you'll receive two phone calls. One has bad news, and the other is from a long-lost friend."

Then, before his eyes, this vision of beauty vanished, and while he was trying to collect his thoughts, the phone did ring. "Mr. Altland, this is the hotel reception. We are sorry to inform you, a friend of yours got seriously injured in an accident and lies close to death in the hospital. The nurses ask that you attend as quickly as you can; your friend doesn't have long to live."

Stunned, Jehoiakim lay on the bed wondering who it could be. As he lay there letting the sad news sink in, the phone rang again, "We're sorry to disturb you in your time of sorrow, Mr. Altland but you have a call from Mark Wilkerson, will you take the call?"

"Certainly. Please put the call through." "Mark Wilkerson! Now, there's a name from my past," he thought as he wondered what was going on.

There was a click as the operator put her phone down, and a voice from his past said, "Shalom, Jehoiakim, long time, no see. It is good to have you home, but what a shame it's for such a sad reason."

Still a little in shock from the two revelations, he replied, "Shalom, Mark, how did you know about the incident? I only heard about it a few minutes ago?"

There was a silence at the other end, and then Mark inquired, "What incident? I've heard nothing, and I was talking about the death of your sister, Anna. What did you think I meant?"

Jehoiakim fiddled with the cable of the phone, and twirling the wire in his hands; he replied, "I'm so sorry to hear about Anna. We were close before I had to leave. Some people believed we had a telepathic link. It's a long story. Are you free for a cup of coffee this evening? If you are, I can tell you about the dream that brought me here this year."

At the other end, he could hear pages turning, and then Mark commented, "I have a free period of two hours before I need to catch my flight back to Tel Aviv; we can talk then."

Jehoiakim put the phone back in the cradle and walked to the balcony. "Did I come back this year because Anna died? Did we have the link that our family and friends thought we had?" There were so many questions to be answered. Only suppositions were remaining now she had died - but something had called him back.

He went inside and poured a coffee while he waited for Mark to arrive. There were so many mysteries about why he felt the need to return this year, and now, without Anna, there was no way to get the answers. Jehoiakim got lost in his thoughts, and he almost missed his cell phone ringing, "Jehoiakim Altland, may I help you?"

A voice on the other end replied, "Shalom, Jehoiakim. I got back a few hours ago. The last two bookings were canceled owing to public disorder over immigrants in the cities involved."

A little off his guard, he stuttered, "Shalom, Adrianna. It is good to hear your voice again, I'm sorry about the cancellations but pleased to know that you're safe. I'm down at Eilat. Later in the week, I wish to visit Masada to do some research for a short story I'm writing called "Ghosts of Masada." For the next few days, I'll be free if you want to visit for a day or two before your break."

Adrianna replied, "You can try to stop me, but I can't come down for a few days. I have some things that require attention here in Tel Aviv, but I'll be down for the weekend."

Jehoiakim had just put his phone in his trouser pocket when the room phone rang. The lady at reception said, "Mr. Altland, there's a Mr. Wilkerson here for you. Shall I send him up to your room?"

He replied, "No, I'm on my way down. If you could tell him to wait a few moments, I'd be grateful." Jehoiakim put the phone back in the cradle and walked over to the balcony. As he watched the

waves breaking on the beach, he wished there was time to relax, but for the next few days at least his time would be taken trying to solve the mystery of why he had needed to return this year.

Chapter 4

Reunited.

Jehoiakim took the elevator down to the lobby. Although Mark had been a close friend, the two friends had lost touch many years ago, so Jehoiakim had no idea what his friend had become. As he walked across the lobby, the receptionist saw him and pointed out his guest. Mark arose from his seat as Jehoiakim approached and shook his hand. As they sat down, Mark signaled to the desk for two coffees and inquired, "Shalom, my long-lost friend. What brings you to these shores?"

Jehoiakim sat down and said, "Shalom, Mark. I wish I could answer your question, but I can't. For the last few months, I kept walking, seeing a lady - who I now think of as the personification of what I see as a Jewish woman - beckoning me to Eilat for some reason. By the way, my sister, Anna, and I were always close, but until you told me, I had no idea she'd died. Some people would say that our closeness gave us a special bond enabling us to feel each other's pains; there is no way I can prove that is correct, but I can tell you that we had a sixth sense about certain people in our circle of friends, and that wasn't a good feeling. So, Mark, what brings you to Eilat - I thought you lived in Arad?"

Mark sat still, trying to think about how to say what he needed to say and not hurt his friend too much. After a short pause, he decided the truth was the best way to go. "There's no easy way to tell you this, Jehoiakim, so I'll tell you the truth. We have no way of telling how Anna died. All we can say is she didn't suffer. She was a victim of a rocket attack. The Iron Dome system of rockets that protect our land is excellent, but now and again a missile gets through. She was in the market when the rocket hit and died instantly; if the blast didn't kill her, the masonry did."

Mark paused to let the news sink in, then continued, "For myself, I moved to Eilat three years ago, when I was offered a job organizing Eilat Pride for a season. I got so good at the job that a temporary appointment became a regular job. One of the better things about Israel is there is no stigma about being gay - which, in case you didn't know, I am."

Jehoiakim started to weep - not a thing he often did despite the horrors he'd seen over the years. "I can't thank you enough for being honest with me, Mark. I know it can't have been easy to tell me,

after all, you and Anna were once engaged."

Mark continued, "Even though that was long ago - and we split up by agreement - after we parted, the disappointment of the loss made me lose interest in ladies. That is why I now choose male companions. All I have left are the memories of our times together as children on the beach. What has life done to us?"

Silence followed for many minutes as the friends sat and considered their lives since school. Mark was the one who broke the silence when he asked, "It is strange that you came back at this time. Not only has Anna died, but we have lost another great friend. The Lord moves in mysterious ways."

Jehoiakim glanced around the lobby, and then said, "Ever since we landed, I've had the sense that someone is following me. I can't say who or why but something weird is happening, Mark."

Mark gave a short laugh and then commented, "Not your composite lady friend then."

Glancing furtively around to find a recognizable face, Jehoiakim replied, "No, this time it is someone I know I have seen on the TV, somewhere, but where and when I don't recall."

Mark attempted to track the direction his friend was watching, but Jehoiakim changed his view too quickly to follow. "Do you think I might be able to recognize this person?"

Jehoiakim thought for a second and then replied, "I doubt it. I think it's a lady I used to work with, but I haven't seen for a long time. The thing that concerns me is that I can't recall her name or her face."

Mark glanced at the people moving around the lobby, and then said, "Do you think she - or he - was on your flight?"

Jehoiakim replied, "I can't say, but I very much doubt it as I changed flights in Milan. There is no way this person could have foreseen that happening." Turning to his friend and looking to the sky, he continued, "Lord, help me, that change threw me a curveball."

Mark smiled and commented, "I did hear about your stopover. You met Adrianna Kucinski, if I'm not mistaken - don't worry, we weren't following you. The state is small, so news travels fast, and the news that the famous Kim Altland - Mark reverted to Jehoiakim's old familiar nickname - was returning spread like wildfire. Will Ms. Kucinski be visiting you here?"

Jehoiakim turned in his seat to face Mark, and replied, "Yes,

she's got some work to do in Tel Aviv, and then she's coming down for a vacation before the winter forces her to stay at home. I planned to talk to her when we met, but the meeting didn't go according to my plan as she thought she saw someone from her past and got spooked."

Mark finished his coffee and then said, "You run in a unique company, my friend. I'd expect nothing else from a top journalist. Shall we take a stroll down the street?" The two men left the lobby and started to walk down the street. After a few minutes, Mark stopped and said, "We need your help as a journalist to attempt to convince the West that Israel is not an aggressor, that all we're doing is defending ourselves."

Jehoiakim took his friend by the shoulder, and commented, "Consider the task as done, Mark. I'll do all I can to tell the West what is happening here." After a pause, he continued, "I can't believe what is happening to my beloved Israel. With all the internal strife, we're heading for a civil war, and the state will be the victim. The old ways need to change for us to live in the new world, or we'll end up doing the work our enemies failed to do."

Over the evening and the next days, the friends renewed their friendship. One day, sitting in the bistro before meeting Adrianna at the airport, Mark asked Jehoiakim, "If this is your aliyah, do you plan to stay?"

Jehoiakim glanced at the world around him and replied, "I had a life back in the UK; it wasn't much, but I'd made friends. I can work as efficiently from the laptop here, as I can in London. In the last year or two, I felt as though I was not welcome in some parts of the country. All over the continent, antisemitism is growing like wildfire; it isn't safe in some cities. I saw signs on the sidewalk warning of Jews in some neighborhoods. At the moment, I'm undecided, and I have things to sort out in my mind that are plaguing my thoughts. For now, we need to get to the airport to meet Adrianna; I'm sure she doesn't wish to be bothered about my concerns on her break."

Chapter 5

On the beach.

The two men waited for Adrianna to disembark from her short haul trip from Tel Aviv. As they approached her, Jehoiakim said, "Adrianna, this is my friend Mark Wilkerson. We go back too far to admit." He paused to give the group time for a laugh, then continued, "Did you resolve your issues?"

Adrianna smiled and replied, "Shalom, Mark. It's nice to know that Kim, as you call him, has friends here; he's been away too long. Kim, I did resolve some of the issues, but not entirely to my satisfaction. There is still the question of why I saw the vision at the airport when I did. I contacted a doctor I know, and she said perhaps guilt over not being able to say goodbye to my friend caused me to see it. I think there is more to the situation than that, but I can never prove anything. The autopsy on my friend's body was inconclusive because the fire was so intense that the police could not use the DNA they found. The only evidence of her identity was the driver's license. But enough about me, did you solve your mystery lady issue?"

Jehoiakim smiled and then said, "Yes, she visited me in my hotel room. She turned out to be an illusion, a composite of what I look for in a Jewish lady; that's why she seemed so familiar to me."

The trio left the lounge and caught a cab to the beach. Sitting on the sand, watching the sunset: what could be better? What they didn't realize was that from the promenade eyes were watching their movements. Jehoiakim sat quietly, too quiet for his friends to feel comfortable. Adrianna inquired, "I haven't known you very long, but I have the feeling that you sense something is wrong, Kim. Would you care to take us into your confidence?"

Jehoiakim started to talk, and as he did, he cast his eyes over Mark's shoulder to the promenade. "I'm sure somebody has been following me since I landed two days ago. Everywhere I go, I see the same face in the shadows, but I cannot make out any definition. I can tell you it's putting me on edge. Don't look now, but I'm almost certain the person is watching from the promenade; I have no idea what they're planning."

On the promenade, an attractive blonde-haired lady of mature age stood watching the girls in their bikinis serve the customers their drinks. She smiled, her time was near, and her target was in

sight. Silent as the night, she stepped onto the decking leading to the beach, waiting for the girl she had seen waiting on the table she was watching. With a smile, she said, "I'll take this order."

She walked along the decking, hardly disturbing the sand under her feet as she did. When she arrived at the table, she said, "Here are your drinks, Kim. Gracious, I haven't had the opportunity to talk to you in a long time!"

Jehoiakim looked up in surprise and then smiled and said, "So, Hannah, it has been you following me since I landed. How did you know where to find me?"

Hannah swept her hair back and raised her hands to the sky before she commented, "Oy vey, Kim, why do you say "following"? There is nothing sinister in my motive. I was trying to catch up with you, my friend, so that we can talk. I missed you by seconds in the lounge at Tel Aviv. As I viewed the departure board, I saw your plane was heading to Eilat, so I booked in on the next flight."

Adrianna looked at Mark, and both shrugged. Mark said, "Okay, now we've ascertained that nobody was following you, can you please introduce us to your beautiful friend, Kim?"

Jehoiakim laughed, and then said, "Hannah, please join us as we enjoy the evening air. Adrianna, Mark, please meet Hannah Horne from the Danish TV network. She and I worked together on a few articles while I was in Europe, and on more than one occasion, we came so close to death, we could smell fear. So, what brings the lovely Hannah to Israel? Surely not the aliyah of a lowly journalist such as myself."

Hannah glanced across the table and then replied, "Actually, that is the reason I am here. You may consider yourself a hack journalist; others don't. I didn't come to find you. My remit was to get the story from inside the state. I was passing through the terminal, trying to gather some information when I saw you. I asked myself who better to give me the private side of life here than you. My boss wants to know the lowdown on what is going on in Israel. The public is getting tired of being fed trash by the media, and he thinks you could be the man to bring the news to the people of Europe. Your reputation for hitting hard and fast has earned you a lot of respect in our country."

Jehoiakim smiled and then replied. "In the west, my views go

unheard. The liberal press feeds the public a laughable media image that Israel is an apartheid state. Not only that, but many Palestinians say they would rather live in Israel than in a Palestine run by Muslim standards. The problem is that the majority are afraid to speak out for fear of reprisals."

Adrianna glanced at Mark, winked, and then she said, "You two must have been close, if he allowed you to call him Kim, Hannah."

Hannah turned to face Adrianna and replied, "In the trenches, not knowing if we'd survive the attacks, formality goes to the wall. I called him Kim, and as he didn't tell me otherwise, I assumed he was okay with it. Kim, what's the reason behind your trip? I know you of old: you rarely take a breather without trying to find a story to write. You're a force of nature, and you find it hard to rest."

Jehoiakim glanced at Hannah and commented, "This time is different, Hannah. I need a short rest. Abir says if I don't take a break, he's worried I'll have a breakdown. I do have some plans for later in the week. For now, I'm taking a few days off to rest and hopefully get some things off my mind."

Hannah glanced at the waves crashing on the golden sandy beach, then after sipping her lemonade, she asked, "What's troubling you?"

Adrianna decided to tell Hannah what she thought was troubling Jehoiakim, "I think what Kim means, is he's troubled by the vision of a woman who enticed him here. He said she's the embodiment of the image of his late aunt."

Jehoiakim continued, "That's not the only reason I'm trying to solve the mystery. I feel there is more to this than just an image calling me home. For one thing, why this year of all years?"

Mark added, "Do you think it could have something to do with your sister's death? There are many reasons why you could have felt the calling this year. What you need is an answer or at least a reasonable explanation."

Jehoiakim scratched at the stubble on his face, and then commented, "I don't know now, but I'll be damned if I am not going to give it my best shot. Something is going on in the background, and I need to know what it is. This situation is like a puzzle that won't reveal itself until the end. At any given time, the picture appears close, then something turns up, and the pieces get shuffled showing new images. I have the feeling that the lady I keep seeing is only a messenger, and the real truth lies out in the desert heat."

Turning to view the hills, Jehoiakim added, "The truth may be out there, but will I find it?"

Hannah followed his glances and raising her glass, and she said, "If I know you, and I think I do, you'll find what you want or die trying." She paused for a moment and then continued, "For now, let's live in the moment and enjoy the gentle breeze and the smell of the sea. The smells of the ocean always make me feel hungry, and I'm willing to try something new to eat. Does anyone have any ideas?"

After a little thought, Mark commented, "You could try Vorschmack. It consists of chopped herring, with hard-boiled eggs, apples, onions and a small amount of vinegar. It's one of my favorite snacks."

Hannah was about to order, when Jehoiakim said, "Make that Vorschmack all round, It's been a long time since I tasted the cuisine of my homeland. Like Hannah, sea air gives me a healthy appetite."

The waitress came over, and Mark ordered Vorschmack for the group. While they waited, the friends had the opportunity to take a few minutes to relax and enjoy the scene as the sun set over the Red Sea, giving the appearance of a giant cross.

The young girl taking the order smiled sweetly at Mark, licked her lips provocatively, and then said with a grin, "Thank you, your order won't be long. Can I refresh your drinks?" Nothing got past Hannah, as she said with her usual openness, "Is she a friend of yours, Mark?"

Mark smiled and glancing towards the groups of boys splashing in the water; he said, "Oy vey, Hannah! She's almost young enough to be my granddaughter - if I had one - and besides, she's not my type."

"I apologize, I didn't consider you may be gay, Mark."

Mark chuckled and replied, "It's okay. I am not surprised. It isn't something I flaunt, but on the other hand, I don't try to hide my sexuality, either. That is one of the good things about living here. We can be who we wish to be, and as long as our community doesn't create trouble, we aren't bothered. All these young people wish for is the chance to lead a life away from the horrors of the sex trade. Most only go in to pay their bills, but once you enter, there is no way out usually."

Jehoiakim smiled at Mark and then said, "In all the years we

have known each other. Mark never made a play for me. We are aware of our tastes and don't cross the lines of our friendship. Now, if I have a fatal flaw, how do you suggest I correct it, Hannah?"

Hannah leaned closer, beckoned Jehoiakim to her, and then she kissed him full on the lips, before pulling away and saying, "The same thing that makes you so good at your job. You're driven to push yourself to the point of excluding personal contact. If you'd let your guard down once in a while, I'm sure you would find a lady with no problem,"

Jehoiakim laughed and then replied, "That is my problem, I never felt my work was good enough, and as such, I am driven to push myself beyond my limits to try to do better each time. In the end, the drive has destroyed my social skills as I have become more introverted and involved in the chase for recognition."

Mark rose from his seat and said, "Work, work, work, all you think about is work, Kim. Here we are on a beach with two attractive ladies, and all you can think of is your assignment. We should be out there, splashing in the waves, not here talking about work."

Adrianna and Hannah didn't need a second request, and they took off their shirts and trousers to reveal their bikinis underneath. Though they were mature women, many young heads turned as the two ran down to the sea. Hannah saw what was happening, and with a smile, she said, "We can still turn heads, Adrianna. We may be older, but our age makes us more desirable to young men who prefer culture to pop music."

Adrianna stopped running to catch her breath and then replied, "Is a tree that has aged gracefully with time not as attractive as a young sapling? The young may have more energy. We have the advantage of having lived and experienced life to our benefit, Hannah."

Adrianna's slender body glistened with the water as she ran through the waves, each step splashing more water on her tanned skin and each droplet looking like a rare jewel. Hannah's body lacked the slender tones of her friend's, but the young men still admired her fuller figure as she dived into the waves, then rising like Helen of Troy from the water with her blonde hair sticking to her face.

Mark stripped to his waist and rushed through the foaming waves to be with the two. As he did, some of the younger men

looked his way with passion showing on their faces. Adrianna glanced up the beach to where Jehoiakim sat, and then asked Mark, "Is Kim joining us?"

It was Hannah who replied, "I doubt it, he hurt his back a while ago and finds it easier just sitting down. He did tell me he used to love swimming and was a good swimmer in his youth."

Mark waved to Jehoiakim, and then replied, "In the few years that we have known each other, I can vouch for that. He was never a fast swimmer, but he could out swim most of us over longer distances."

The three friends splashed merrily in the warm sea, enjoying the last rays of the setting sun, casting a red glow over the water and the beach. Walking back, Adrianna asked Mark, "Do you think Kim's happy sat watching us in the water?"

Mark had never thought about that question, but he replied, "His view is that if we're happy, he's glad for us. That could have changed over the years, but knowing Kim, I'd say nothing has changed. Anyway, if I know him, his mind is most likely trying to reason who the mystery lady is and why she brought him to Eilat?"

The sun dipped below the horizon, giving its final glorious coating of bronze to the sea, and then darkness began to close in as Jehoiakim called to the group, "Who's for a walk along the beach in the moonlight?"

The friends paddled out of the water as Jehoiakim admired the beautiful ladies' bodies, and smiled to himself. He thought, "Perhaps Abir is right that this is my romantic interlude, but which of my two lady friends likes me?"

Adrianna finished drying, and said, "Before we go for our walk, I'd like a coffee to keep the chill out if that's okay."

Jehoiakim smiled and then replied, "I'm for that idea. I don't need a reason for a cup of coffee; we can meet in the cafe in about fifteen minutes," He walked with the others to the hotel elevator, his mind still ticking over why he was here.

As he opened the door to his room, Jehoiakim sensed something moving on the edge of his vision. Turning quickly, he failed to catch sight of the image, but when he returned to view the window overlooking the beach, his mystery lady came into focus. "It is good to see you again, Kim," she said with a seductive tone to her voice, a voice he could easily liken to the soft feel of melted honey. "I was watching you on the beach, and I can tell you have many questions

for me to answer, so ask, and I'll see what answers I can give."

Jehoiakim turned the kettle on for coffee, and then he asked, "First, why me? There are many other Jews you could have asked."

The mystery lady smiled and then commented, "You are a writer with a reputation for asking hard questions and not giving up. That's what the country needs these days with the UN supporting the Palestinian claims. Our voice needs to come from an independent writer, not from a writer who has spent his life here."

Jehoiakim sat at the counter, watching the kettle boil, and then asked, "Okay, I can see the point. Why here? Why not Tel Aviv or Jerusalem?"

The image wavered as though she found herself lost in thought and then continued, "The reason for bringing you here is so you're close to Masada. The reason for this, you'll learn later."

Jehoiakim stopped talking, as a thought came to his mind and the kettle boiled. He poured out his coffee and continued, "If I'm correct, we're only a few minutes closer to Masada here than in Tel Aviv. I am still at a loss as to why you chose here."

She smiled and replied, "It isn't the distance but the journey that matters. From here, it's almost a straight run to Masada, but besides that, Tel Aviv is crawling with journalists and camera crews. For our purposes, you need a clear mind."

Jehoiakim gave a short laugh and commented, "I can't disagree with you there. As much as I enjoy the variety of life in the city, I much prefer the calm of the outer reaches of the metropolis to being in the hub. You said I'd find the reason for this visit soon; how can you tell the future?"

The mystery lady turned to look out of the window and said, "Time to me isn't the same as it is to you. To me, it is one entity; I can see the near future as clearly as I can see the past. Soon, you are going on a journey that will change not only your writing but your life, that is all I know. The one element that's essential to your future is the trip to Masada in the morning."

Jehoiakim put his cup on the counter and said, "How did you know about that? There is one possibility, you're able to perceive my thoughts. But that is a bit too obscure to be rational, isn't it?"

The lady glanced at the clock and said, "Not in the place where I reside. Now, you must be off to meet your friends, or they'll think you're on the verge of having another breakdown by forgetting this evening, and I can't have them thinking that. You have big things

happening shortly, and Masada will be the moment you look back on and wonder what would have happened if you hadn't taken this opportunity."

In the glimmer of an eye, she became as faint as the image left after you turn the TV off. Jehoiakim was left to wonder what she meant about Masada. It was evident to him the trip would prove to be pivotal to his future, but in what or how many ways? He gathered his thoughts, washed his cup out, and then walked into the passageway leading to the elevator. The elevator arrived within a few seconds. Hannah opened the door for him and then pushed the button for the foyer. Slowly, or so it seemed to Jehoiakim, it descended to the lobby. As the doors opened, Jehoiakim blinked at a bright light, and after a few seconds pause, he said, "Didn't you see that light? There's someone out there watching me."

This sudden turn caused more than a little concern among the friends, and Adrianna said, "There was no light, Kim. Who do you think is watching you and why?"

Jehoiakim shook his head and replied, "I don't know why I think someone is following me, but I believe that it could have something to do with a trip I had planned."

Turning to Jehoiakim, Mark asked, "Do you want to cancel the trip to avoid a possible confrontation, Kim?"

Jehoiakim thought for a moment about what he'd been told in his room and then replied, "You'll think me silly, but my mystery lady appeared a short while ago and said the trip tomorrow is essential for my future path. I realize that sounds silly - after all, and she only exists in my mind. Does this mean that subconsciously I think the trip is essential?"

Mark laughed and then replied, "Typical! Now you go existential on us, Kim. But, you could well be right; we'll need to wait until the trip to get the answers."

Adrianna smiled to herself as she began to realize she may be falling for the strangeness of a writer, who only a few days ago, she didn't know. "Perhaps, Abir was right sending Kim on this break, but not in the way he thought," she mused. "What did your mystery lady tell you about the trip, Kim?"

Jehoiakim turned to face Adrianna and commented, "All she said was that the journey was to be a turning point in my writing career. I need to go on this journey to enhance my rep for writing; beyond that, I'm as much in the dark as anyone."

The four friends strolled along the beachfront as the sunset on the distant horizon gave the evening a golden glow. There was a moment's darkness, and then the moon rose, casting her eerie shadows across the landscape. "What a change moonlight makes to the landscape," Hannah commented. "It takes the evening glory away and replaces it with a shadow presence that could hide evil."

Adrianna shivered and said, "I don't know if it was what Hannah said, or the chill of the night, but I felt as though somebody walked over my grave again. I don't know about you, but I think I'll turn in for the evening; after all, if we're to go to Masada with Kim – and we are, aren't we? - we have to have an early start to beat the midday heat tomorrow."

Jehoiakim looked out to the sea and replied, "Adrianna's right, we need to get off as soon as we finish breakfast or the heat will be too much for me, if not you. I know I won't be able to stay out long in this dry heat."

Jehoiakim strolled back to the hotel, his mind wandering onto what the mystery lady had meant. He thought, "How will this trip alter my career?"

Chapter 6

The Masada Pilgrimage

Breakfast was taken early as none of the group wanted to be late getting up. There was something odd about Jehoiakim's mystery lady; it wasn't only that she could see a little way into the future, but she talked in riddles.

With the last of the morning coffee, Mark said, "If you wait a few minutes, I'll make a call to a friend of mine to see if we can borrow his car for the journey. I don't think he'll object; we've been close friends for a long time."

While they waited, Hannah asked Jehoiakim a question that had puzzled everyone, "Did your friend tell you why she wanted you here? After all, Tel Aviv is not that much further than Eilat from Masada?"

Jehoiakim turned to Hannah and replied, "She only said the journey was less troublesome and would cause me less pain."

Adrianna looked puzzled as she asked, "Are you in severe pain?"

Jehoiakim winced and then replied, "It isn't serious, but I have had back pains for years. The pains started several years ago when I slipped in the snow in London."

As Hannah and Adrianna took in this news, there was a honk, and Mark waved at the group. "Come on, time's a wasting, and the sun is rising," he called out.

The friends looked at each other, then at the car, and shrugged. The vehicle looked old and beaten up, fit to drop at any time, but Mark assured the friends it would last the journey. The car started with a jerk, not a good sign for a trip of almost two hours across the desert, but the friends trusted Mark's judgment and besides, the car was the only one available on short notice.

At the entrance to the Masada National Park, they pulled up, and Hannah said, "Do you think you can make the hiking path, Kim, or should we take the cable car?"

Jehoiakim looked at the footpath, not more than a very steep goat's trail, and replied, "I should be okay with the walk, thank you. If I get in trouble, I have good friends to help me."

The late morning sun cast a warming light over the harsh landscape as they started the 50-minute walk up the trail. Above them stood Herod's fortress, carved out of the Jewish desert, a monument to the will of the Jews never to be taken as slaves after

their escape from Egypt. From the path it is easy to see why the fort had never fallen: it has a view of the countryside for many miles, and nobody could make a sneak attack in this barren landscape.

The heat took its toll on Jehoiakim; as he reached the top, he asked his friends, "Can we have a rest before we go on, please?"

Mark replied, "Being honest, I didn't expect you to be able to get up here, Kim. The walk took it out of me, and I'm fitter than you."

Sipping some water from his canteen, Jehoiakim glanced across the court that surrounded the group, and commented, "I can imagine how they felt, trapped here. It must have been a terrible choice to make. On the one hand, you have the Biblical belief that no man shall take his life as the Lord has given him life, and only the Lord has the right to end that life. On the other hand, the choice of seeing your women raped in front of you before being taken to live as a slave - what would we do?"

Mark replied, "That is a problem. As Jews, we believe in the Scriptures, but not everyone can understand what these people did. In the eyes of many, they were wrong, but were they?"

Mark and Hannah were taking in what lay before them when they noticed Jehoiakim suddenly turn his head to the stairs. It was Hannah who asked, "What did you see?"

Taking a moment to gather his thoughts, Jehoiakim replied, "I thought I saw movement on the stairs, like a shadowy figure from the past. It's probably my vivid imagination combined with fatigue and the heat."

Adrianna glanced at Jehoiakim and then said, "I wouldn't put it down so easily to heat and fatigue. The idea of spirits getting trapped is easy to understand., These places elicit strong emotions. What you could have seen was an image of a lost soul caught up in the essence of the stone."

Mark watched his friends as they thought about what Adrianna had said. He wasn't sure of its validity, but having an open mind, he wasn't willing to shut out the possibility of what she had said as being correct. After a short pause, he said, "The humidity is rising. I suggest we make our way down and head back to town before we pass out."

Taking Mark's request in hand, the group started to make their way down the tortuous track; all went well until the last few meters when Jehoiakim tripped, "Damn, my ankle's gone. I feared this would happen one day. It's my curse to have weak muscles around

my joints, and now I've paid the price."

Adrianna rushed to Jehoiakim's aid. "Come on, we can support you to the car, but when we get back, I'm taking you to the hospital to get your ankle checked out. I can't have the man I love being in pain."

Jehoiakim smiled and held her close as he said, "I didn't think you thought of me like that. How long have you felt that way?"

Adrianna commented, "I had an inkling from our first meeting, but it wasn't until I returned that I was sure. There's a magic about you that draws me to your side. I can't put my finger on what it is, but it is there."

Hannah smiled and said, "I can tell you what it is, Adrianna. It's his genuine charm in a world of lies where it's hard to find honesty. I wish you both all the happiness you can get."

On the way back, Jehoiakim sat in the back with his leg resting on Adrianna's lap to ease the pain of the sprained ankle. As they entered the city, Mark made straight for the hospital. As they pulled into the waiting area, Mark said, "I'll leave you here while I return the car and get mine from home. I'll be with you in a minute or two. The doctors are good here, but don't expect to get seen soon; it's a basic triage procedure."

The wait for a physician didn't take long after all, and Jehoiakim, Hannah, and Adrianna were waiting at the door when Mark returned. As he pulled the car to a halt, Mark asked, "What's the verdict?"

Struggling along on his crutches, Jehoiakim replied, "The doctor says I've got a torn tendon, and I'll need bed rest for six weeks to give the damage a chance to heal. He added that as I have other medical conditions, there is little to no chance of it recovering fully - if at all."

Mark sighed, "I'm sorry to hear that, Kim."

Jehoiakim commented, "Thank you. I have been waiting for this to happen for many years. The injury wasn't so much a case of if it would happen as when it would happen. It does put a new spin on things. I'll be staying a while, and I'll need to make some arrangements as I was only expecting to stay a few days more."

Hannah glanced at the sea and said with a sigh, "I'd like to stay here, but my job calls, and I have to earn my keep. I'll be flying back in the morning. Please remain in touch."

Mark glanced across to Hannah and commented, "That's one

request I'll gladly follow, Hannah. Talking about the day ahead, what are your plans, Adrianna?"

Adrianna smiled at Jehoiakim and then said, "I'm going to stay with Kim for the next few days, and then I need to get back to Haifa to continue with my work, but I'll stay in touch with all of you."

Jehoiakim glanced at the car and commented, "I'll be resting, but I'll be thinking of a story to write about this trip. Talk of the devil, I'll have to phone Abir as soon as we get to the hotel and let him know of the change of plans."

The drive from the hospital to the hotel was over quickly, and Jehoiakim hobbled out of the car and into the foyer. As they crossed the lobby, the receptionist noticed Jehoiakim struggling and rang for a wheelchair. The chair arrived as Jehoiakim and Adrianna were halfway to the elevator. After thanking the bellboy, Adrianna helped Jehoiakim into the chair and pushed him into the elevator.

The rise to the floor where Jehoiakim was staying appeared slow to him. For the first time since his accident, he began to take stock of the situation, and he didn't like what he saw.

Before he knew it, he had arrived at his floor, and Adrianna wheeled him across to his door. He opened the door and looked at the room layout, wondering how he would cope in his new world. With some trouble, eased himself out of the wheelchair and onto the bed to take the weight off his injured leg. As he lay back, he could hear Adrianna in the kitchen, putting the kettle on and making some sandwiches. "I wonder if my mystery friend will come now she knows Adrianna is here?"

Adrianna came into the bedroom to find Jehoiakim sitting up with his head in his hands, "What's on your mind?" she asked.

He looked up and replied, "I was wondering if the mystery lady would show herself now you're here. I haven't got the meaning of what she said about my career either, and that is puzzling."

The answer to his question didn't take long to come, as the lady showed herself, "It's good to meet you, Adrianna," she said with a bright smile that lit the room. "I'm certain you probably thought that I was a thing of Kim's imagination and not able to be viewed by others. As you see, you can see me."

Adrianna put the cups on the bedside table with shaking hands and replied, "It's nice to meet you, too. I did question his idea in the beginning, but as I got to know him, I realized the truth behind what he was saying."

The visionary lady continued, "The answer to your question, Kim, lies in what you saw today. You'll know what I mean once you call Abir. I'll bid you both a farewell for now, but I will always be close to you."

Jehoiakim sat on the bed for a few minutes, and then he dialed Abir's office in London. He waited for a few seconds to hear his friend's voice, and then he said, "Hi, Abir, I have some bad news for you. I had an accident yesterday, and the doctor said I'm not fit to travel for a few weeks, so I'll be staying here. I can still write the articles, but I'll email them to you this time."

Abir thought for a minute and then replied, "I'm sorry to hear about your accident, my friend. I hope it isn't too dangerous. Of course, you can stay. The ticket I sent is open; you can return when you want. I'm sure you've got some interesting articles to write about your visit."

There was a pause as Jehoiakim thought of what the lady had said, and then he said, "Abir, I have an idea for a story called "The Ghosts of Masada" if you're interested."

Abir didn't wait long to reply as he said, "That's a great idea. You can make a spiritual and historical connection to the story. What a coup! I look forward to reading your article."

Jehoiakim waited for the click to hear that Abir had put the phone down; all the time, his mind was ticking over his new project.

Jehoiakim put the phone in the cradle and lay back on the bed. He was drifting to sleep when he felt Adrianna's soft lips caress his lips, and he smiled as the two lovers embraced their love. The partners spent the next few days in perfect bliss, the sunny days and moonlit nights couldn't have been more romantic if they had designed them for their delight. However, one night, things took a turn for the worse. Adrianna was dozing on the bed when suddenly she let out a terrible scream. Jehoiakim came to her aid as quickly as his injured leg would permit and holding her close, he asked, "What's wrong, love?"

Adrianna rolled onto her side, her face pouring with sweat as she trembled and replied, "I had an awful nightmare. I got trapped in a burning car. People were all around, but the flames were so intense nobody could put the fire out; my body got burned so badly that it was impossible for anyone to identify me."

Jehoiakim held his lover close as she trembled with fear, "Do

you think this could be related to the visions you saw at the airport of your friend in the burning car?"

She had to think for a moment. Then she replied: "I wouldn't discount the possibility, but how do the two relate?"

Kim tried to think of a reason for the two incidents to be linked. In the end, logic defied him, and he said, "All we can hope is that either you can receive a message in a dream, or your doctor can give you some assistance in making the connection, Love."

She laid back, her head resting on the damp pillow and commented, "I had a feeling that something wasn't right about the accident. I can't say what it was, but there was something odd about the crash and the body."

Jehoiakim held her close as she tossed restlessly, her mind searching for answers to the questions she had got asked. The couple finally fell asleep in each other's arms, even so, Jehoiakim was still concerned that Adrianna's nightmare would come back to haunt her in the future.

When the sun rose, and they got up, he asked, "Did you get some rest, Love?"

She smiled and commented, "You were right; my friend came to me last night in my dreams. The reason I thought something was wrong about the accident is that my friend wasn't the one killed; she wasn't driving at the time of the crash. The police could only assume she was the driver because her driver's license was in the car, but it was her friend, Dianne, who died in the crash, not my friend. My friend said that some criminals had found out Dianne was an accountant and were forcing her to break the law, doing illegal money transfers. My friend was sorry that Dianne was being chased and died in the crash, but she said it's for her good to remain 'officially' dead."

Jehoiakim smiled and said, "I'm pleased we could resolve your mystery. I'm still wondering whether the purpose of my visit to go to Masada was to get the idea for a story, or did I have a call before then to return but ignored it?"

Adrianna rose from the bed and walked over to the wardrobe to pick out a dress. As she brushed her hair, she said, "That is for you to decide. Love. I'll help, but the decision about what made you return has to be yours, only you can decide why you came this year."

After having a wash and ordering their breakfast, Jehoiakim

decided to take the day off and relax on the beach as Adrianna was leaving late that afternoon for Haifa. He was sitting in his chair, listening to the waves as they splashed on the sand when he had a blinding pain behind his eyes and yelled in terrible pain.

Adrianna rushed to his side and holding him to her; she asked, "What happened? You seemed to have an attack of some kind."

Jehoiakim blinked and replied, "It was Anna, my sister. She came to me. She said that she was calling me home, as we never had a chance to say a proper farewell when I left for England all those years ago, and she has missed our talks ever since."

The day slipped by like a gentle breeze across the sands of time, and before long, it was time for their last coffee of the afternoon. The lovers had their coffees, and Jehoiakim kissed Adrianna and said, "I'm sorry I can't come to the airport with you, Love, but as you see I have no way of getting back without help, and Mark can't take time off as he is too busy with work."

Adrianna smiled and hugged Jehoiakim, then said, "That's okay, I understand your situation. Love. It would have been nice to be together, but as you say, you would have no way to get back."

The bus pulled up to the front of the hotel, and Jehoiakim watched as Adrianna got on. After finding her window seat, she glanced out and blew him a kiss as the vehicle pulled onto the road to the airport.

Chapter 7

The Long Night.

Jehoiakim hobbled back to the hotel on his crutches, his mind tossing and turning as to how he should write the article for Abir. He didn't want to make the piece too religious as that could turn some readers off, but he also didn't want to miss the point of the subject - the visit to Masada had given him an idea for a story concerning the conflict between the words of the Scriptures and people's beliefs.

Life outside the hotel passed along its journey, oblivious to his thoughts, and before long, he realized it was time for lunch. Jehoiakim ordered some salad sandwiches and ate them on the veranda when they arrived. His mind ran through the events of the last week from the meeting with Adrianna to the renewal of his friendship with Mark. As he sat eating, he wondered, "Is this part of Abir's plan, or is it part of my mystery lady's plan?"

After he finished his lunch, he took a nap, foregoing his regular stroll along the beach, and wondered if his lover had got home safely. The afternoon passed into the dark of evening with ease, and the sea winds brought a chill to the air. As he expected, the night air made him tired, and, within minutes, he fell asleep.

Jehoiakim woke from a disturbed night - one more in a series - he couldn't recall the last time he'd slept well. His tendon injury made sleep difficult, and his mind was racing about the story he had in mind about Masada. The sun rose across the bay, but he felt no warmth in his bones; too many sleepless nights had left him drained and cold despite the desert heat.

He got up from his bed and hobbled on his crutches to the kitchen, where he put the kettle on for his morning coffee. "Has it only been a day since Adrianna returned to Haifa?" he thought. It seemed like weeks. "I miss her so much, I know she's got her job and now is a respite she needs, but I'd like to see her again."

He was roused from his longing for Adrianna by the whistle of the kettle. While he poured the water into his coffee, Jehoiakim wondered about the sights at Masada - the question arose was there anything to see there or had he just wanted to see ghosts? The journalistic historian in him wanted to know what had happened at the site. Had he seen shapes in the dark areas of Masada? The shadows cast on the walls by the sun could have accounted for what

he thought he saw or did his inquisitive mind create the images?

He opened the doors to the balcony and took his coffee out to the table where he worked; watching the sun rise over the Red Sea made him wonder what his friend, Mark, would think. He knew what Hannah would think if he told her, and he knew what her reply would be "Only you can answer your question. You are the person who thinks they saw shapes; maybe you did, who is to say?" He was lost in his thoughts when his phone rang to bring his mind back to the world of the living. He glanced at the number, and said, "Hi, Adrianna, I was thinking about you. How was your journey back?"

Adrianna replied, "The journey was short but a little bumpy. I always enjoy the drive from Tel Aviv to Haifa along the coast road. I was wondering: have you made plans for the week?"

He smiled and replied, "Not so far. I was thinking about what I thought I saw at Masada, and how to write the story for Abir. I'm waiting on a call from him to tell me how my last piece went with the publishers."

Adrianna replied by commenting, "If Abir is as good an editor as he is a judge of people, he'll be asking you for further articles on the subject; don't worry about the writing. The reason I rang, other than to tell you I was back safe, is to ask if you're free to come up here next weekend. I can't make it down there this weekend as I have a meeting with my doctor on Friday and my editor on Saturday."

Jehoiakim replied, "Next week is good for me, I have some things to sort out at this end for my article, and Mark wants to spend some time with me to talk about my sister's death. I'll phone you when I get a clearer idea of what my plans are. I look forward to seeing you again. I miss your company more each day."

Adrianna smiled and replied, "I am the same; I wish we didn't need to be apart so much. I long to be with you."

"Kol Tuv, until we meet again. I miss your touch so much I can't wait to be with you again," Jehoiakim thought as he put the phone down.

He sat holding the phone for a minute or two, then he turned back to the room and looking at the sea, he muttered, "I'm sorry I wasn't here for you, Anna, when you needed me. Please forgive me."

He sat listening to the sea, splashing on the beach. "I still haven't found a reason why I felt the need to come home this year,"

he pondered as he thought about having a cup of tea, rather than coffee. His mind began to retrace his thoughts about the Masada journey. He had been tired and thirsty: "Could that have caused me to see the shadowy images?"

As a writer, he knew that there are times when people see what they want to, not what is there. But what had he hoped to find at the fort? He hobbled to the counter and switched the kettle on, still unsure what to have: a coffee would give him the impetus to write, but a cup of tea would relax his mind to be able to think. As he looked through the condiments in the cabinet, something caught his eye. "Now we're talking!" he said as he pulled out a packet of ginger with lemongrass tea.

While the kettle boiled, Mark began to attempt to piece together the events of the morning at Masada. "If Abir wants a story from me, I'll need to get things clear in my mind," he thought as he sat in his chair waiting for the tea to be cool enough to drink. As he was sitting down, his phone rang. He looked to see the caller ID and replied, "Hi Mark, I'm putting the tea on if you'd like a cup of lemongrass tea when you come up?"

Mark replied, "That'd be nice, thank you. I'll be up in a minute. I need to arrange something with the lady at the reception, and then I'll come up."

Jehoiakim opened the door for Mark's arrival and then moved to the counter to pour the teas, all the time thinking, "Did I see something, or did I want to see something?" While he was pouring the drinks, there was a knock on the door, "Come on in, Mark, the door is open, " he called from the kitchen.

Mark entered and went to the counter to get his tea, "I've been making some inquiries about the history of Masada and the possibility of other people seeing specters at the fort. So far, your sighting is the only one on our extensive records."

Jehoiakim paused, wondering about what he'd heard, then asked, "Before we go further, can I ask you a question?"

"Certainly, go ahead."

"Did you see anything at the fort?"

Mark didn't take long to give his answer, "No. But then you were at a different angle to the stairs than I was, so that may be why I didn't see a thing. Have you asked the others?"

"I haven't had the opportunity yet. Adrianna only got back this morning; Hannah is out on an assignment in Denmark, and her

editor has lost contact with her. If I am the only person to have seen the apparitions as far as we can tell, this raises the question - am I the only person to have seen them, or the only person to have told someone about the sightings? I wonder if others have noticed these sights, but been too afraid of looking foolish to say anything about them."

"Either way, it begs the questions did you see something and do you intend to do something about what you may have come across?"

"I think the situation asks more questions that we have yet to contend with, Mark."

"I see where you are going with your line of thinking. We need to not only think of the possible presence of trapped souls but to find the answers you seek; we need to ask ourselves about the events at the fortress that day."

"Yes, within the fort's history could lie the answers I seek, or...?"

"Or what?"

Chapter 8

More questions than answers.

After a short pause, Jehoiakim said, "You know me better than anyone I know, so you realize that I could find more questions than answers if I were to return to Masada."

Mark replied, "There is that possibility, so what are you going to do?"

"The way I think about the situation is that I have no option. I need to go back. If I find more questions to answer, then I shall need to cross that bridge. If I don't go back, I may never answer the original question of ``did I see something?"

"I realize that you have no answer now, but let me pose a question for you. Do you think at this moment that you saw something?"

"To be honest, I have no idea. However, the more I think about the subject, the more I convince myself that I did see something. The question remains what or who was it I saw?"

"Wandering off the subject a little, do you find your inquiring mind a bother at times?"

Jehoiakim laughed, then replied, "Yes, at times it is a real pain to have a mind that seeks knowledge. I wish, sometimes my mind would be calm and accept things, but then I would not be me, would I."

Mark smiled and commented, "No, you wouldn't. We'd get used to you, but it would be weird if you stopped your search for the unknown, it has been the focus of your life for so long. Do you have an idea what started this mindset, or when it started?"

"That is a question that I can answer. I began my search as soon as I was able to read, reading gave me access to new worlds, and from that point, I sought knowledge."

"One thing I do know is you have a restless soul, Kim. Do you think you'll find a place or time to have peace in your mind?"

"Mark, I don't think I will find peace. I have a mind that continually seeks to expand my knowledge; it is one reason why my writing is so popular."

"Do you have other reasons?"

"Many, the main reason is I tend to ask questions that people wish to have answered but don't wish to ask."

"On the topic of unanswered questions. Did your mysterious

friend tell you why she told you to take your aliyah this year?"

"Not in so many words; all I could gain was that she felt something was holding me back that I need to resolve. I have many questions about this visit that I need to have answered, not the least is how will Abir react when he hears I hope to stay here."

"I am sure he'll be delighted for you. He's been your friend for so long all he wants is the best for you. When did you decide to stay?"

"I decided to stay the day we arrived in Eilat. The UK is beautiful, but I miss my home in Israel too much to want to return. Plus, the rise in anti-Semitic views in Europe isn't a good thing."

"Whatever your reasons, I'm pleased you're staying. I hope your return doesn't hinder your writing."

"I wouldn't worry about that; I have plenty to write. For now, I plan to stay here, but I'd like to revisit Italy; I didn't get the opportunity to see much when I met Adrianna in Milan. We crossed paths and had no time for ourselves."

"Tell me something, if we go back to Masada this afternoon, if we see a spirit, will it be because you want to see one, or because one resides there?"

"I can't say, Mark. All I can say is I am sure after the deaths, and with so little evidence, there must be a lot of residual spiritual energy remaining as the souls are not at rest."

Mark sat quietly for a moment, then said, "Don't you find that your belief in the afterlife conflicts with your Jewish beliefs?"

Jehoiakim smiled and replied, "At times, but I have witnessed so many things that challenge me both as a person and as a believer that I have moved to a more generalized spiritual belief than our faith. I'm not saying I have given up on the Jewish faith. I am saying I believe in another realm whose existence we deny at our peril. To deny the existence of the afterlife is to challenge the existence of life at its core, in my opinion. The afterlife co-exists to teach us that we have souls. I use this belief in conjunction with our faith, to give life some meaning. After the suffering I've seen, I need to think there is release from pain when our physical bodies come to rest."

"As I followed some of your travels and writing online, I can understand why you feel like that. In fact, with what you've witnessed, I'm surprised you are relatively sane."

"Relatively, is the word. I doubt my sanity, especially when I

begin a new story. How much of what I witnessed do I show in the story and how much do I need to hide to maintain the integrity of the story?"

"For your protection, I imagine that you do keep something back, but even if you don't print it, you've witnessed the event, and that is in your memory."

"You're right. Half of the things Hannah and I heard, heard about or saw we could never tell others. You'd think people were incapable of sinking to such depths, and there were times I thought we weren't dealing with human beings but some throwback to an unknown form of almost animalistic creatures."

"How do you cope? My job is hard enough."

"A bottle of whatever is cheap and deadens the pain the quickest was the best cure-all we found. See, but don't think too hard about what you see. The problem with that is we saw such horrors that the cure was becoming the problem. I won't pull any punches, Mark. If Hannah hadn't been there for me, I wouldn't have gotten out alive."

Mark thought how to phrase his reply, then said; "As always, you underestimate your ability for survival. I'm sure that you would have found a way. After all, you are too tough to die yet."

Jehoiakim smiled, patted his friend on the shoulder, and commented, "What you mean is I'm too irascible to see my Lord now."

Mark laughed and replied, "Yes, you'd only turn heaven into hell the way you are now. You need to find some peace of mind, Kim."

"I know, but I doubt I'll find it. My mind is rarely at peace even when I am dozing; my mind is seeking a story to tell."

"As I said before, you must find your active mind very tiring."

"You can't imagine. It's like having an engine that continuously runs. Sooner or later, I'll break down. Perhaps that is why I got the call stronger than ever this year. Anyway, if we're going back to Masada, we'd better set off before the sun gets too hot for me to travel."

Chapter 9

Back on the track

The car drove across the desert road, and Jehoiakim began to think that perhaps the return trip to the fort wasn't such a good idea after all. Each mile took more of a toll on his aching body. He hadn't realized those city cars, and desert roads had no part to play together. For this trip, Mark's jeep was better suited. He glanced at Mark and could see his friend was thinking about something. "Que Pasa?"

Mark took his eyes off the road for a second to reply, "Nothing serious, and it's nothing to do with me. I was just wondering about your days with Hannah."

"Go on; you know you can ask me anything."

"I feel awkward asking these questions, and it is none of my business what you do."

"Oy vey! you know I'm an open book; you can ask what you want."

"When you were with Hannah, did you think about making love?"

Jehoiakim laughed aloud at some unforgotten memory and then commented, "Yes, every night we went to bed, the idea crossed my mind, but I have my boundaries. We base our relationship on mutual respect, and as she made no mention of the subject, I thought it wasn't my business to raise the topic."

Mark smiled and replied, "You are honorable to the last. Now you've met Adrianna, did the thought of a threesome cross your mind?"

"I won't lie, the idea did cross my mind several times, but I dismissed it as quickly as it appeared. Both ladies are attractive to me, but I respect the bonds of friendship more than my desires."

"Do you find it hard combating the urges?"

"Not in the slightest. As I said, I value friendship too highly to put it to the test. A good friend is hard to find these days."

There ensued a period of calm as Mark focused on driving and avoiding the many rocks on the road. It wasn't an easy task as the rocket attacks had reduced the area to piles of rubble. Even though Jehoiakim never said a word, each time Mark glanced at his friend for a moment, he noticed the pain Jehoiakim was going through. Mark thought, "He's in pain, and it's getting worse, but he won't let

me see how much he is hurting.”

Mark stopped the car in the car park. At this time of day, spaces were plentiful, and he offered to help Jehoiakim in getting out of the vehicle. “I realize it's not your way, but I wish you'd be more open with me about how much you're hurting. I'm not prying; I want to help you, that's all.”

“I know, I'm very grateful for the offer, Mark, but I don't wish to become a burden to my friends.”

“I won't tell you what I think we'd answer, because you know what we'd say to that statement. You've done a lot for others, and now it's time to let your friends help you.”

The two-hour-long drive to the mountain had taken its toll on Jehoiakim. Not only the heat and humidity, but the rough roads also caused his ankle a lot of pain. When the car stopped at the crossing, Jehoiakim viewed his destination and scratching his stubble, he said; “This trip's on me. We'll need the cable car as I won't be able to walk up the slope.”

Mark wiped the sweat from his eyes and replied, “You won't get any arguments from me. In this heat, I couldn't walk up either, and besides, I know you'd tell me off if I refused the offer.”

The friends laughed at the thought of Mark's turning the offer down and getting a punishment.

Jehoiakim said with a deep sadness in his voice, “I know the time has come. I can't deny that I do need your help; I'm grateful beyond words, as the days when I could walk are over, and I'll need any assistance my friends can offer.”

As he took Mark's hand, Jehoiakim said, “I think I'll be able to walk to the cable car, but I'll need to sit on the trip up.”

As the car began its climb to the fort, Mark commented, “It's easy to see why this site was chosen to make the final stand against the Roman Empire. With its water supply, it is invulnerable to attack; nobody can get within miles without being seen or heard.”

“That is the heart of the mystery. The fort fell after a siege in which hundreds of Jews committed suicide rather than be taken, prisoner. That goes against all the teachings of the Tanakh: as the Lord gave us life, only He can take it from us. I can imagine the torments the Jewish men went through, either go against our laws of society and kill your family or watch as your women are raped and put into servitude.”

“Yes, it was a horrid choice to have to make for the families

here. As a man, even though I don't have a family, I can think of few things worse than being forced to watch my wife and daughters raped and dragged away to serve our enemy as sex slaves."

"The other mystery about the siege is how the story is told. It has been written as a great Jewish sacrifice, not a victory for the all-conquering Roman Empire. The only written account is by Josephus, a Jew who wrote about Roman conquests, yet the story remains in the form of sacrifice. Josephus knew that to write the story in this manner could mean his death, and he went ahead regardless of the risks involved. The main mystery to me is why he was not told to change his story to make it read like a statement of Roman power, that the Jews could hold out, but they would fall in the end?"

"Why do you think the story is left unchanged?"

"My view is that the story remains in its original form as a mark of respect to the men who killed their families that night. The Romans were a powerful fighting force, but they were still men who had families back in Rome. They knew the torments that would endure for those forced to put their family to the sword rather than see the family live as servants in the service of their enemy."

"We can't expect to resolve the mystery, so what are you hoping to achieve by this visit?"

"I'm only attempting to answer one question, and that is, did I see a spirit on our last visit? I cannot be sure, but the knowledge of those people, of how they chose to die, and of the few remains that are here, leads me to believe that there are souls trapped in the walls of the structure. Stone is a wonderful reserve for spiritual energies."

"What happens if we don't see the spirit, will that mean you don't believe it is there?"

"Not entirely. All that will prove is that the time and conditions are not the same. I believe the spirits of the dead have been trapped in the fortress. Life is energy; energy can be transformed but not exterminated. As water turns to steam when you boil it or to ice when it's frozen, the water is still there, only in a new form. There is the chance that the spirit is still there but unable to communicate with us this time."

"What do the ladies think of your ideas?"

"I was talking to Adrianna before she left. She, like me, believe in the spirit world as she has had some unnerving experiences and

dreams herself. Hannah is more pragmatic and needs proof, but we witnessed such horrors on our travels that she started to believe in the alternate world of the afterlife, even if she has no physical proof of its existence."

"Will you be disappointed if the spirit doesn't show this afternoon?"

"In a way, I will be, but there are so many variables beyond our control that I would be foolish to think that our visit would induce another spiritual encounter. I am going today on the off-chance that the spirit will turn up, but I don't expect anything."

The cable car came to the end of its climb, and Mark helped Jehoiakim step out of the cabin. The sun was rising high in the sky, and Jehoiakim was already having trouble breathing with the heat, humidity, and altitude. He said, "I can't stay here long; the heat is already getting to me."

Mark replied, "That's fine, we won't need too long, I think, as the sun is on the rise and soon there will be little shade to be found."

The friends stumbled along in the heat, seeking the few areas of shadow available so Jehoiakim could rest, and watch for a sighting of the spirit if it appeared. As they sat in the shade, a thought came to Mark, and he inquired, "We never asked if you could tell if you saw a man or a woman."

Jehoiakim thought about his vision and answered, "I couldn't say. I only had the briefest glimpse of a figure in a robe as it passed across a doorway." He tried to relax, but the stifling heat made him uneasy, even sitting, Mark could see he was beginning to sway in the humidity.

They had been seated for only twenty minutes when Jehoiakim said, "I can't take this heat. Can we leave now, please?"

"Yes, of course. I may not have your heart condition, but the heat is becoming oppressive for me, too. The cable car should be here in a few minutes, and then we can make our way back."

Mark sat in peace despite the heat and dryness of the air; his eyes were stinging from the saltiness of his sweat. Jehoiakim was wiping his eyes when he thought he saw something, "Mark, come here, please," he called. "Over by the stairway, do you see what I think I see?"

Mark rose from his seat and walked over in the heat to where Jehoiakim sat. With a glance in the direction that his friend mentioned, Mark replied, "If I look carefully, I can make out a faint

shape against the rocks. Could that be your spirit, Kim?"

"I think the shadow could be what I saw, Mark, but it's heading down the stairs into the shell of the fort. The path down to the lower level is too steep for us to take safely. I can only assume that the dwellers who had lived here, took that route as they knew the Roman soldiers could not follow them and then they found they had become trapped by the steepness of the stone steps, unable to come out, and the Jewish settlers were left to die."

"Are you satisfied with what we've learned?"

"I am. I know I saw the spirit. What its meaning is and why it showed itself to me at that time is open to endless conjecture and is something I think will not be solved."

Mark saw the lengthening shadows and said, "It's time we made our way back. I don't know about you, but I could do with some shade. I may have been born and live here, but I can only take so much of this heat."

The trip back to the cable house was short, but Jehoiakim was feeling the strain of being out so soon after his accident. "When we get back, I'll need to have a long rest; my ankle is beginning to seize up. I can feel the tension building in the joint, and the last thing I need is for my leg to give out on me."

Chapter 10

Back to work

Try as he might, Jehoiakim could not ease the pains in his legs during the drive back to Eilat from Masada. Mark could see his friend wince with each bump on the road or at each turn on the way. When he pulled the car up to the hotel, Mark said, "I'll take you to the foyer. You can sit for a while as I park the car, and then I'll help you to your room. I do not want you to attempt to try to do anything before I return!"

Jehoiakim grimaced with the pain and replied, "You have nothing to worry about, without your help, I'm unable to stand, let alone walk!"

Mark eased Jehoiakim out of his seat and supported him as they walked to the foyer. The afternoon heat was taking its toll on other visitors as a crowd of tourists entered from the street. Jehoiakim watched the tourists and wondered where they lived and questioned their reasons for visiting Israel. He realized that many were probably not Jewish, but he was pleased to see how many visitors there were, despite the terrorism in neighboring countries.

Unknown to Jehoiakim, Mark watched his actions from the front of the foyer, "Always watching people," he thought as he watched his friend viewing the crowds in the lobby. He said, "Okay, here we are, I'll call the elevator, and I'll take you to your room for a rest. Do you have plans for the week ahead?"

Jehoiakim sat on a chair, waiting and watching as the elevator descended, then he said, "My first plan is to get in touch with Abir, to see if he wants my story and how he wants me to compose it."

Mark laughed and commented, "If Abir wants your story? How long have you been on the staff?"

Jehoiakim had to think hard, then replied, "If I am right, about eight years."

"In that time, how many stories have you written?"

Jehoiakim paused to make a rough calculation, "I think I've sent in about 70."

"And how many has he rejected?"

"None as yet!"

"And what gives you the impression this time will be the first?"

"I don't know. It could be because we have only a flimsy collection of maybe's and no real evidence. On the other hand, it

could be that I always doubt my ability to write a good story."

"I think you've hit on the problem. The issue is not the story but the fact you question your ability to write it. That is your strength: you never take a thing for granted; you always doubt yourself - to the point of disdain at times if you ask me."

"You're correct. I can't deny that I am my worst critic. The more people read my work, the worse I am getting. I have a dread of letting others down now that my readership has grown. At one time, I was more concerned about how I would come over, and now it's more a fear of disappointing others."

"All I can say is, do you trust Abir to make the correct choice?"

"In the years we've worked together and been friends, I have learned to trust his wisdom."

"There is your answer to the question. Trust Abir to make the correct choice for his magazine, and you get back to doing what you like and enjoy: writing articles. I see our chariot is here, let me take the wounded soldier to his room."

The two men entered the elevator and waited in silence as it moved to the floor where Jehoiakim was staying. Jehoiakim leaned on Mark as he hobbled to his room and then said, "At some time, I'll need to find more permanent dwellings if I'm staying here, but that can wait. I have more important matters to attend to now." Mark watched as Jehoiakim sat down, then he said, "You get comfortable, and I'll boil the kettle for a cup of tea for us. You have a lot to think about over the next week or two."

"I know, I need to prioritize my time in the next week. Last week was so rushed with the sudden urge to return; I didn't have time to plan this trip."

"If you need help, I'm here for you." Thank you, I am sure I will at some time as things are moving too fast to keep track of, and I want to contact Adrianna soon about a trip we have in mind." Well, that is news to me. I didn't realize you'd got that far. Where do you plan on going?" I had in mind Milan, as we can use it as a staging post to visit Bergamo. When I passed through last week, I noticed some things I could write a story about." You always had an idea about Milan, didn't you? You never wanted to visit Rome or Venice." I'm more interested in Northern Italy than in the religious center or the "supposed" romance of Venice. I wanted to go where few people go and enjoy the countryside. What amuses me is the way Italians from the various regions regard each other. And the

Milanese make the finest coffees."

"I noticed you were watching the visitors as they passed across the lobby downstairs. I suppose that's the writer in you." It does help in writing if you can use what you see in life in your work. But before I consider travel, I have work to get done. Abir could be waiting for my call as the last time we spoke was some time ago." I know you, whatever you do, don't forget to eat; Abir wouldn't want your death on his conscience." You have no worries there. I am hungry now, but mealtime isn't for an hour. I don't wish to snack as it ruins my appetite. I don't want anything too heavy. Can you order me some sandwiches while I get a rest, please?"

"Okay, I'll go to the restaurant and see what we can have. I won't ask what you want, as I know the answer - fish. I have never known anyone with such a desire for seafood as you have. I think if you weren't a writer, you would be happy as a fisherman."

"With the growing popularity of my writing, you could almost say I am a 'Fisher of men.' I didn't set out to be more than a writer, but my writing gets more readers the more I write, and that pleases me."

"I'll be as quick as I can, but I saw the queue was growing when we came up, so don't expect a quick meal."

Mark put a cup of tea on the table nearest Jehoiakim and turned to leave. As he did, Jehoiakim said, "I may be a while; I don't know if I can contact Abir with the time difference."

Jehoiakim heard the door close, and then he rang Abir's office in London. The time in the UK was just after 0900, so getting through should be easy, Kim thought.

After a short time, a voice said: "Abir Solomon's office, can I help you, please?"

It took Jehoiakim only a few seconds to recognize the voice, "Hello, Joanna, is the boss in yet?"

There was a giggle at the other end, then the reply "Oy vey! Are you ever in hot water, Kim!"

Jehoiakim was taken aback and commented, "Why? What have I done wrong this time?"

"I won't let you into the secret, and I'll let the big man tell you in person, L'Chaim, Kim."

Jehoiakim heard the click as Joanna put the call through and waited for the tirade he thought was coming his way from Abir. The tension was palpable, and Jehoiakim could hear Abir breathing, but

Abir paused to compose himself before speaking. "Shalom, my prodigal son, has returned to me."

Still unsure what lay ahead, Jehoiakim replied, "Shalom aleichem, Abir. How have I upset you?"

There was a pause, Jehoiakim began to think the matter at hand was getting close to the nerve when Abir commented: "What makes you think you did something wrong?"

"Joanna said I was in hot water."

"You are in hot water, not for doing wrong but because I had the Danish network on the phone last night asking if you could give an interview, and I had no way to contact you in Israel as the hotel told me that you had gone back to Masada. To me, it made me think I am a bad editor if I don't know the location of my best writer."

"I am sorry. I needed to find some answers to questions that had come up. To others, it will mean you have one of the best writers with a curious mind who seeks knowledge at each turn."

"Did you get your answers?"

"To my questions, in some ways, I did succeed, but I got not closer to understanding the big issue over Masada. I doubt anybody will unless we dig for archaeological remains, and even then the evidence will only lead us to what we can deduce from what is left. I never solved the larger question I thought about."

"Which was?"

"Why did I see the spirit at the time, and nobody else did."

"There is one theory, the spirits become visible only to those who believe in their existence."

"I could believe that, but it raises another question for me. Have these spirits appeared to others, but the other people were afraid of being thought stupid by admitting to seeing them?"

Jehoiakim heard Abir take a breath before he said, "Oy vey, why do you ask a poor editor like Abir such vexing questions? Are you not my best writer?"

"That is not for me to say, Abir. I am grateful for your wisdom in allowing such a mere scribe as myself to grace your pages."

"Back to business, do you have a story in mind?"

"Yes, but I am not happy with it as it doesn't answer my questions, and it is in my mind a weaker story than the other stories I have written."

"In what way do you mean 'weaker'?"

"My readers expect fire and passion, and this is a calmer, more thought-provoking piece."

"That's good; it will attract a new group of readers. Never be afraid to change tack when seeking readers. I had thought you, of all my staff, would have realized the value of surprising your readers. Over the years we have known each other, the one thing that has kept you in high-esteem, in my opinion, is you are not predictable. Writers come, writers go, but you have stayed and become stronger because our readers never know what you will be writing, only that it will keep them enthralled. In all this talk, I forgot to say how sorry I am to hear about your accident. You will be missed here in the office, but you have my blessing if you wish to stay after the aliyah has ended."

"Thank you, I have a life in the UK, but in recent months, I have felt uneasy with the growing anti-Semitic feelings in some of the media. I feel a need to send reports back from home to show what is the true Israel as opposed to the biased views of the media in the West."

"I can relate to those feelings, and I am pleased that you are there for us; your stature in this paper will add strength to your words. People know you don't pull punches, and it has made you enemies."

"Enemies I can cope with; it's the feeling that somewhere around a corner someone could be waiting for me, that I find it hard to live with."

"As I am expecting a return call from the network, what shall I tell them about your availability?"

"My plans for the next week involve writing the article on Masada for your next issue, doing some research for my next article about Italy, and going to see my lady friend in Ra'anana. After that, I am hoping to take a short break and fly to Italy for a few days to get my strength back. At some time, I hope to be able to get out to Haifa and Bethlehem to see what the fire damage is from last year. I saw the videos, but I want to see for myself what damage was caused in the city by the firebombs thrown by the terrorists. Some people will argue that those who threw the bombs could not foresee what happened. I venture they may not have been able to know the extent of the damage their actions would cause, but they knew Israel was going through the worst drought in over 50 years. The land was dry, and the area has olive trees, so it is a good bet, in my

opinion, that they hoped that all these factors would result in considerable damage. And, not forgetting, as I am staying, I'll need to find a room somewhere to use for work. If you wish, you can tell the network I can be contacted in Milan in two weeks, as that will be my port of call for my rest. Did they say who wanted to do the interview?"

"Yes, your friend, Hannah."

There was a pause, during which Abir heard Jehoiakim breathe and reply, "That'll be one tough interview!" Then he laughed.

"Two weeks, in Milan? When they call, I'll let them know of your plans, shalom aleichem."

Jehoiakim replied, "Aleichem shalom," and put the phone down on the desk. Then he hobbled to the sink to fill the kettle. He smiled and mused, "I said all that, and yet I need to confirm the plans with Adrianna."

He was thinking about how he'd approach the subject with Adrianna when there was a knock at the door, and Mark called, "Come and get it while you can!"

Jehoiakim stumbled to the door. As he opened the door, Mark asked, "Did you make the call to Abir?"

"Yes, he is fine with the article being less provocative than my usual works; he said it would get a larger readership with the change in direction."

"What do you think?"

"I'm wary about the change, but I favor Abir's direction as a leader; he has not been wrong so far. One more thing arose. He said the Danish networks wish for an interview, and the person concerned will be Hannah. It'll be nice seeing her again, but I am wary of being interviewed as I know her style."

"From what I've seen, she is like you."

"Exactly my point. If anything, Hannah is more ruthless than I am, and that is daunting as I know how tough I can be when doing interviews."

Mark laughed and said, "I'm sure you'll do well; after all, you make part of your living interviewing people."

"That is what is daunting; this is the first time I will get interviewed."

"There is the chance that she'll come here again to do the interview. Hannah did appear to enjoy the country the last time she came, even if it was only for business."

"Abir said he would tell the Danish network to arrange a meeting in Milan in two weeks; I haven't asked Adrianna if she wishes to go yet.

"I'm sure Adrianna would be delighted to go with you, the pair of you have earned some time for a romantic get-together after all the hubbub of the last month. Knowing you as I do, I can imagine you have a story in the making for the trip."

"Yes, I did get some ideas for a story when I passed through Milan on my way to Tel Aviv, but they are only insignificant concepts, and I think it would be a real challenge for me to attempt that story, perhaps too much of a challenge."

"I've read your profiles online, and to my knowledge, you have only thought that about one other story."

"Yes, you're correct. I did think of a mystery romance called "Two Lives for Freedom," but when I saw the timelines involved, I realized it was beyond my capability as a writer."

Mark finished his sandwiches and said, "I have work to get done, and you need to call Adrianna, so I'll bid you Shalom until we meet again,"

"You are right, and I still have lots to plan out if this trip is going to work. Aleichem Shalom, until our paths cross once more, my good friend."

Chapter 11

The call to Adriana.

Jehoiakim put his plate in the sink and returned to his chair on the veranda to make his call to Adrianna. Adrianna didn't pick up her phone at first, but after several rings, he heard her say, "Shalom, Kim, how is my love today?"

Jehoiakim replied, "Shalom, Love, I am doing as well as can be expected, Mark and I returned from our trip to Masada a while ago, and I want to ask you a question. It isn't serious, but it could be fun."

"If you got back from Masada, did you resolve the mystery that puzzled you?"

"I believe I saw the spirit, but I doubt we will understand what happened during the siege. Abir wants me to write the story, even though it won't be as aggressive as my usual writing. He tells me that Hannah's boss wants her to interview me for Danish TV. I said we could meet in Milan if that is okay with you."

"I'd love to go to Italy. I can spare a few days from work. When did you have in mind?"

"I have some things to do here, not the least is my work for the esteemed Abir. I was thinking of the week after next, possibly leaving Thursday for a week. If you can spare that long?"

"I have an appointment with my doctor that week, but I can reschedule it if you wish."

"No, I don't wish to interfere with your plans, love. Are you still having those nightmares?"

"No, these are new nightmares concerning flying. I have no idea what can have triggered them; I have flown many times and never felt concerned now."

"We can put the trip off until you think you are more at ease, love. I don't want to force you if you don't feel up to it."

"What about the meeting with Hannah?"

"Don't worry about that. Italy will be there next year. All I have now is an idea for a story, no more. I was planning on meeting with Hannah and getting information for my story at the same time. Besides, I am sure Hannah wouldn't want me to leave you feeling this way. If the network wants the interview, I am confident they can send Hannah to us in Israel as simply as they can send her to Italy."

"But you'll miss the publicity if you don't go."

"I would rather be here with you, than fly, knowing you didn't feel happy flying. As for the publicity, Hannah is capable of sweet talking her boss into arranging another time and place."

There was a pause, and then Adrianna heard Jehoiakim laugh, "Okay, Love! What is so funny?"

"Sorry, Love. I was looking at my calendar and realized that I'd got carried away with the plans for the trip. I can't make it that week as I need to register with the hospital, so I can make an appointment to see a specialist about my heart."

"In that case, we can hold off our trip for a week or two. Now we've cleared that up, what do you have planned, other than your work for Abir?"

"I want to see about finding an apartment here, but before that, I would like to visit you in Ra'anana when you feel up to it. There's no rush. I am not going anywhere as far as I know at the moment."

"I am busy for the next week or two. If I am to take the trip, I need to get ahead of schedule for my next book before we leave; that will take some serious midnight oil burning, but you are worth the trouble."

"While you work on your book, I will spend the time hunting an apartment I can use for a work base. It doesn't need to be plush as I am a man of simple tastes. I prefer a small space with a desk and a few trimmings to a large apartment; it's a throwback to my days in London. However, I think I will add some home luxuries to this flat as it will be more like a home to me."

"If you tell me when you are leaving Eilat, I'll pick you up in Tel Aviv, and we can enjoy the drive here along the coast road. I find the sea air so refreshing compared to the stale air in the cities. I get a feeling of being at ease when I drive along the coast."

"I can relate to that feeling; I often used to drive to the coast when I lived in London. City air is so polluted, and it is hard to appreciate the beauty of nature. Also, there are so many lights, I cannot see the stars at night, and that is something I do miss."

"You'll see plenty of stars up here, and we can go to the mountains and get a view of the night sky over Haifa."

"B'ezrat HaShem, until we meet next week, Love."

"Shavua Tov. my love until our paths cross again."

Jehoiakim put the phone on the charger, as he noticed the battery was low. "Only a week until we meet, but, even that is too

long."

As he stumbled around the room, Jehoiakim wondered how he'd tell Abir the news of the change of plans about the visit to Italy, and how the Danish network would react to the delays. He had just put the cups in the sink when the phone rang.

He picked the phone up to hear Abir's voice saying, "Kim, I have some news for you."

Jehoiakim replied, "Shalom, Abir, I was on the point of ringing you about something when you called. What is your news?"

"I had a call from Denmark. The assignment Hannah is on is running late, and she can't meet you in Milan. What did you wish to talk about?"

Jehoiakim breathed heavily and replied, "I was going to say that we couldn't make the trip because I need to stay to take care of Adrianna for a few days."

"It's nothing serious, I hope."

"No. has had some bad dreams about flying and wants to put off the trip. When they phone again, can you ask them to get Hannah to call me, so we know when we can meet?"

"I can do that for you, as soon as we put the phones down. On the subject of health, how are you?"

"I'm getting used to the need to walk slowly and not rush myself. The hardest part is getting used to limiting what I do. If I do too much, I end up in pain for hours."

"That must be hard for you. I know how much you enjoyed your walking; it gave you time to come to be at peace with yourself in the world of horrors that you had to work in."

"Que sera', I'll have to find another way now. I won't be hitting the bottle to drown the pains; I might take up meditating again; it has been years since I did any."

"To this old man, it appears that our need to talk had a common meaning. We wanted to say the same thing but from a new perspective. Our goals are the same, give my regards to your friend, and tell her I hope she can get over her dreams."

"Thank you, Abir, I shall do that if I see her next week."

Chapter 12

Weeks passed, and Adrianna never heard from Kim, at one time this would have caused her concern, but not now. She muttered "What a fool I was to think he'd contact me again."

She was thinking of what she could do next when her phone rang; Adrianna had gone past the days she rushed hoping it was Kim calling, her attitude had become *If I miss the call, and it's important the caller will call back.*

However, this day, she was able to answer the call; half-heartedly she replied "Hello, how can I help you?"

A voice from the other end said, "Bonjour, Adrianna, this is Marte de Ritter calling from Solagne in Belgium. It has been a long time since we had a chat, how are you and Kim getting on? The last I heard you were a loving couple, but that was nearly six months ago."

Adrianna replied, "Hello Marte, were is the operative word; I haven't heard from Kim since he accepted the offer from Abir, and I am not sure I want to now.

Marte's shocked reply was "I am sorry to hear that, did the incident with Hanna have anything to do with the separation?"

"No, I believe him when he said they slept together that time as they didn't wish to die alone in a foriegn country. Besides, apparently, Hanna has a female companion living in Finland who she loves. I appreciate the new job takes his time, but he could have called me sometime after work. As far as I am concerned it will take a lot to get back what I thought we had, Marte."

"So, what are your plans now?"

"I am staying in my apartment in Haifa for a few days, then I was thinking of going to Spain for a short break."

Marte gasped, then commented, "Spain, you know it is almost November, and before long the Levante will hit Majorca and bring with it the cold and damp."

"Yes, I do, Marte, believe me after living in Spain and having to cope with the heat of Mistral from the Sahara, anything is preferable to those winds which make breathing too hard, and dry your lungs. Having little connection to the mainland, and few phones will also come as a blessing to me; I need time to myself as I have to try to understand my visions."

Marte sighed, then replied, "Are they still the same as the ones you had when we met?"

"Yes, I cannot decide if they are visions, or if my friend is trying to contact me but has to remain hidden for her safety."

"Have you any idea how long you'll stay in Spain?"

"I hope to be on Majorca for about a week, I may stay longer as it depends on the weather and being able to get back to Valencia to catch a flight back here. I am in no rush, the publishers are not expecting a book from me until the middle of next year. Talking of books, how is your latest *L' Enfant Terrible* coming along?"

"I have spits and spats, you know me and my habit of forming new storylines within each book, this is no exception I have several themes I could run off this book."

"I read the excerpts you sent, I wanted to ask, is there any element of your life in the story?"

Marte giggled, then replied, "Don't I wish. I am stuck with MedHis for the next two years. I know they bring the money in, and pay the bills, but I want to leave Medieval History to venture into a new world."

"I can imagine how you feel, that is my wish when I do my next book, Now all I wish for is a quiet break to think things through."

The chatter died for a moment or two, then Marte said, "How would you feel about a companion on your trip to the Balearic Islands? I was planning a short trip to Murcia after my meeting with a publisher as I have some ideas for a mystery set on the coast."

"That is a wonderful idea, Marte, as we haven't seen each other for a long time and had time to chat with no outside influences. We won't have many home comforts, but I'm sure we can still have a lot of enjoyment going back to the basics, and who knows, this trip could give us some inspiration; either for stories or for spiritual comfort."

I do miss my time in Spain, Adrianna, I had such a pleasant time when I was in my semester I didn't want to return to Bruges. Life back then was so unrushed, how I miss those days. I have no worries of meeting my deadlines for the books, but I wished I could have some time to myself."

"I can understand how you feel, Marte. There are times I wish I could turn the clock back; things here are quiet for now, but I am hoping for a phone call from Kim before we leave, but I am not holding my breath."

“What are you going to tell him if he rings you?”

“The truth, as far as I am concerned we are over as a couple, but we can remain in contact. Our lives were not meant to be together - C'est La Vie. On another subject, have you heard from Sarah since we spoke last?”

“I haven't been in contact with her for a few days, but I know she has been travelling around Italy so I am not surprised we lost contact. I hope she'll be in contact soon as I would like her to join us in Majorca.”

“That would be great, the three of us back together for the first time since our college days in Spain. What is she doing in Italy?”

“From what I can gather, she has problems with her superiors and has taken some time to get away while things ruminate over her actions; she did mention something about police corruption.”

“That's our Sarah, never one to take things lying down, always out for justice even when it puts her at risk. I must kiss and say goodbye for now, phone call from Kim or not, I have to pack for our trip. I hope to hear from you again before we leave, Adios.”

With that comment, Adriana put the phone down and got on with her tasks, she had gone past hoping Kim would call her, but she had prepared what she was going to tell him so many times it has become ingrained in her memory.

Chapter 13

Adriana calls time on the relationship.

Adriana got on with the packing as she'd said, not even giving a passing thought to the possibility of a call from Kim; when out of the blue her phone rang. She glanced at the caller ID and replied, "Hello, stranger."

The caller replied, "Is that any way to greet the man who loves you?"

"Let me see, Kim, since we got back you have become a stranger to me. I understand your work is important to you, but I thought I meant something to you too."

"Adriana, you do, it's just that setting the paper on its way is taking my time. I do think about you."

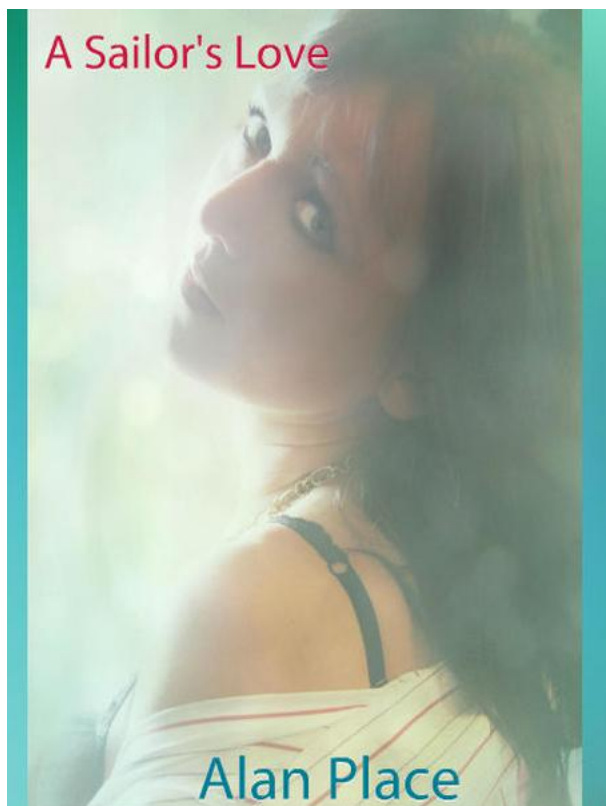
"Do you? It's been months since you called and I am moving on with my life, I stopped waiting for a call from you weeks ago. I was considering calling you to tell you that from next week I will be out of touch as I am taking a break with some friends from college; we're going to Majorca for a short vacation; then again, I thought why bother as you would not realise I am not in Israel?"

"But."

"There are no buts, as far as I am concerned, Kim we are friends at best from now on. You have your life, and I have mine, I wish you and the paper well for the future - zay gezunt - farewell."

Stunned by this turn of events, Kim put the phone down and began to go over the events that had led to the end of this relationship. How things that had appeared to be fine had now turned to ashes in his mouth. He had the paper, but nobody to share the joy of living with.

Did you love *A Homecoming*? Then you should read *A Sailor's Love*
by Alan Place!



The drama of Wagner's "Flying Dutchman" combined with the deep rooted honesty of Britten's "Peter Grimes" and Charlotte Bronte's romantic "Wuthering Heights." These fine elements of the art of writing form the basis for the story of two people -- a lovelorn girl and a stranded sailor -- whose paths crossed one stormy night, in a story of passionate romance and mystic charms.

Read more at [Alan Place's site](#).



About the Author

Alan made his reputation writing spiritual stories before moving into the world of the hard-boiled PI, where his stories about the young PI (Pat Canella) were recommended by an Australian police officer.

In later years, he wrote the best-selling sci-fi series of books about Forgestriker. The seven book series that starts with Sons of Baal has sold over 750 e-books since its beginnings in January 2014

Read more at [Alan Place's site](#).